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LECTURES

ON THE

PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH,

BY

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ROBERT MACCULLOCH, **D. D.**

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT DAIRSIE.

SO THEY READ IN THE BOOK, IN THE LAW OF GOD DISTINCTLY,
AND GAVE THE SENSE, AND CAUSED THEM TO UNDERSTAND
THE READING. NEH. VIII. 8.

BLESSED IS HE THAT READETH, AND THEY THAT HEAR THE
WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY, AND KEEP THOSE THINGS WHICH
ARE WRITTEN THEREIN; FOR THE TIME IS AT HAND. REV. I. 3.

L O N D O N :

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

MARTHA Countess of ELGIN and
KINCARDINE.

MADAM,

THE publication of the following Lectures affords me an agreeable opportunity of testifying the high esteem which I entertain of your Ladyship's amiable character, and of the illustrious example whereby you have adorned your elevated station;—and of expressing my grateful sense of the favour and patronage which I have received from your Noble Family.

IMPELLED by sentiments of respect and gratitude, I have the honour of presenting this small offering to your Ladyship, whose well-known sacred regard to the word of God, and whose warm attachment to the interests of true religion, fully justify my inscribing to you an Ex-
position

DEDICATION.

position of a most sublime and interesting part of the Holy Scriptures.—With fervent prayers to the God of all grace for your temporal and eternal felicity, and for every blessing to all the Branches of your amiable Family, I am,

MADAM,

With great regard,

Your Ladyship's most obliged

and most humble servant,

Dairie, Sept. 20, }
1791. }

ROBERT MACCULLOCH.

THE

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

VARIOUS methods have been employed, by the wisdom of God, for the instruction of mankind. Histories have been written, in which the great events of antiquity are distinctly recorded, the most illustrious characters are faithfully delineated, and the most important lessons are forcibly inculcated. Laws have been published, stamped with divine authority, showing the good and acceptable will of God, in the keeping of which there is a great reward ; and serving as a lamp to guide our feet into the ways of righteousness and peace. Poetry hath displayed its attractive beauties and graces, with the happy design of captivating our hearts to the love and obedience of sacred truth, and stimulating our ardour in the practice of goodness. The great principles and duties of morality have been enforced in short proverbial sentences, furnishing excellent practical rules of action, and recommending, by the most powerful motives, every part of good conduct. Sublime truths, and interesting discoveries, have been presented to view, respecting the Eternal God, the operations of his providence, the dispensations of his grace, and the glory of his kingdom, calculated to produce

duce the most salutary effects. Prophecies have been delivered, at the distance of ages from the predicted events, unfolding a scheme so astonishingly vast, and altogether unparalleled, as should strike awe and wonder into the hearts of men; and make us conclude, that the subject, in which we are thus instructed, must be of the highest moment, and greatest concern to mankind.

This mode of instruction, though presumptuously assumed by some Heathen oracles, is peculiar to the Most High God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and to whom are known all his works from the beginning of the world. For this purpose he raised up successively a race of men, under the special direction of his Holy Spirit, who, for many ages, delivered one prediction after another, giving notice of the great events which, commencing in early ages, reacheth to the consummation of all things; particularly describing the dignity of our Redeemer's person, and the glorious purposes for which he came into the world. This method of conveying knowledge by prophecy, is, above all others, attended with many important advantages. It serves to raise admiration of that beneficent scheme devised by infinite wisdom for our recovery, and to convince men that the subject to which it relates must be of the last consequence to the inhabitants of this earth. It shows the truth of the sacred oracles in the most striking light; and affords a proof, that is continually growing stronger, that the scriptures are the word of God. It also encourages us to entertain the pleasing hope, that the blessed designs
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which God hath in view to accomplish, shall be proportioned to the greatness of the means used by him who worketh all in all. With this agreeable expectation, we enter with pleasure on the consideration of the prophecies before us, deeply impressed with a sense of their excellence, variety, and usefulness.

As to the subjects treated of in this inspired book: It contains a rich variety of matter, well deserving our most attentive consideration. The inspired writer having been employed as a teacher of the people, his discourses are not merely prophetic, they are replete with instruction, admonition, reproof, and consolation. They abound with animated representations of the infinite majesty, the perfections, providence, and government of Jehovah; to which is added, a historical description of some interesting events which happened in the days of our prophet. They are enriched with many excellent precepts, which show us what the Lord our God requireth of us, and direct us in the paths of righteousness, whilst the opposite sins are marked and reprehended in such a manner as tends to awaken the conscience and affect the heart. They are interspersed with declarations of the gracious purposes of God toward his people, with denunciations of awful judgments against transgressors, with assurances of deliverance to the penitent, and many powerful arguments to the duties of obedience. Above all, they treat of the great Messiah, typified by the rites instituted under the former dispensation, prefigured by many righteous men, and whose way was prepared
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by the whole series of events which preceded his appearance. Christ, especially Christ crucified, throws a most agreeable light on the Old Testament, particularly on the prophecies of this book. Unless the rites and sacrifices, appointed under the former dispensation, are considered in reference to him, they will seem a confused heap of unmeaning ceremonies. Unless we view the prophecies as ultimately receiving their completion in him, and the interests of his kingdom, they will seem wrapt up in impenetrable obscurity. On the contrary, when we trace their connection with our Saviour, the centre in which all the great lines of revelation unite, what admirable order and design, what agreeable symmetry and proportion, what beautiful harmony and œconomy, are conspicuous in the different parts which compose the whole, framed to convey the most useful instructions, and to promote one great end!

These prophecies then concern us, as well as those to whom they were first delivered. They assured them of the certainty of events then future; they instructed them in the mind of God, and were admirably fitted to inspire them with reverence for that sovereign hand which uniformly directeth all things. The partial accomplishment of these predictions ought to be considered by us as an agreeable pledge and security, that those which remain to be fulfilled shall certainly have their completion in due time, whilst it affords us strong encouragement to intrust all our concerns in the hands of our faithful Creator. It is therefore both our duty
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and interest diligently to study them, knowing that whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.

With respect to the inspired writer, and divine authority of this book : It bears the name of Isaiah, who is repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament, by our Lord and his apostles, as a true prophet, a holy man of God, who spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. Many passages are expressly quoted from these prophecies by them, for illustrating or confirming what they did or said. In reading the New Testament, I found eighteen citations where the prophet is named, and his words plainly recited ; so that there can be no mistake, either as to the writer, or the place intended. I have also reckoned above two hundred and fifty passages in the New Testament where this prophecy seems evidently referred to, though the prophet is not mentioned, nor his words always formally quoted ; yet, on many occasions, the allusion is obvious and striking. This affords every Christian a satisfying proof of the divine inspiration of this sacred book ; and in this he will cheerfully acquiesce, knowing he cannot call in question its authority, unless he deny the inspiration of the New Testament. Indeed the excellent and sublime subjects which are here treated, the harmony, consistency, and purity, that are conspicuous through the whole, with the exact accomplishment many of the predictions have already received, give full proof of its divine

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vine original. It is unnecessary to adduce more evidences on this subject for the conviction of the sceptical, who reject not the word of God for want of evidence, but from love to those iniquities which are therein strictly prohibited and threatened.

That there lived such a person as Isaiah is universally agreed, both by Jews and Christians, and is a fact which cannot be seriously disputed. That he was an eminent prophet of the Lord, remarkable for holiness of life, for the excellency of his doctrine, and the illustrious proofs he gave of his divine mission, are facts abundantly manifest from the Books of Kings and Chronicles. That he was the writer of this justly admired and immortal work, in which he delineates the character of the people among whom he lived, describes the divine goodness they experienced, and foretels their future fortunes, cannot be plausibly denied. Who, before our modern Infidels, ever ventured to question these incontestable facts? and who ever expressed a doubt concerning these things among the Israelites? What better reasons can be assigned for attributing to Virgil or Homer their admired poems, or to Mahomet his Alcoran, than can be given for ascribing the prophecies before us to Isaiah, the renowned prophet of the Lord? This, brethren, is not an ordinary book, which, like many others, may be hazarded under a fictitious name; nor is it a book that, after having lain in obscurity for ages, hath been artfully imposed on us by designing men. It is a sacred book, which the Jews have read with veneration since
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its first publication, and which they have carefully preserved during seventeen hundred years exile, dispersion, and reproach. It is an inspired book, which Christians of every denomination have studied, since the time this honourable character was first given them at Antioch; and which, by their unanimous suffrage, hath been admitted into the canon of scripture, given by inspiration of God, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.

With regard to the style in which these prophecies are written, and the manner of our prophet's diction: There is a remarkable pleasing variety in the mode of his expression, which, as the subject requires, is nervous, figurative, elegant, and sublime. These prophecies, so far as I know, have been generally considered as written in prose. A learned commentator observes *, that the composition has in it a sort of number or measure of an oratorical kind, as he afterward explains it. The celebrated Dr. Lowth, bishop of London, in his Preliminary Dissertation to his new translation of this book, makes the following just and beautiful remarks on this subject, which I shall make no apology for transcribing: Says the learned Prelate, "But if there should appear a manifest conformity between the prophetic style, and that of the books supposed to be metrical, a conformity in every

* Vitringa, Prolegom. in Isaiam, p. 8.

“ known part of the poetical character, which
 “ equally discriminates the prophetic and the
 “ metrical books, from those acknowledged to
 “ be prose: It will be of use to trace out and to
 “ mark this conformity with all possible accu-
 “ racy; to observe how far the peculiar cha-
 “ racteristics of each style coincide, and to see
 “ whether the agreement between them be such
 “ as to induce us to conclude, that the poetical
 “ and the prophetic character of style and
 “ composition, though generally supposed to be
 “ different, yet are really one and the same*.”

And having endeavoured, with great accuracy and taste, to establish his hypothesis, he submits to the judgment of the candid reader his observations upon a subject which hardly admits of proof and certainty, which is rather a matter of opinion and of taste than of science.

The polished Dr. Hurd, bishop of Worcester, considers the prophetic style in his Ninth Sermon, introductory to the Study of the Prophecies. I cannot deny myself the pleasure of transcribing a few sentences from that excellent discourse. The justly admired writer, in a deduction of the causes which produced the character of the prophetic style, says, “ He believes that charac-
 “ ter is truly given by those who affirm, that
 “ the style of the prophets was only the poeti-
 “ cal and highly figurative style of the Eastern
 “ nations. †” And having given an account of the emblematic and highly coloured expression, which glares so strongly in the prophetic scrip-

* Page 3. Second Edit.

† Vol. ii. p. 79. Fourth Edit.

tures, he thus proceeds: “ This then is the true
 “ and proper account of that peculiar style which
 “ looks so strangely, and, to those who do not
 “ advert to this original of it, perhaps so fan-
 “ tastically, in the writings of the prophets.
 “ And what more natural, than that a mode of
 “ expression, which was so well known, so com-
 “ monly practised, and so much revered; which
 “ was affected by the wittiest, nay, by the wisest
 “ of those times; which was employed in the
 “ theology of the Eastern world, in its poetry,
 “ its philosophy, and all the sublimer forms of
 “ composition; what wonder, I say, that this
 “ customary, this authorized, this admired strain
 “ of language, should be that in which the sacred
 “ writers conveyed their highest and most im-
 “ portant revelations to mankind * ?” Having
 quoted these two elegant authors on the subject
 of style, it is unnecessary for me to add any
 thing farther on this topic.

As to the distribution of the several parts of
 which this book is composed, and the arrange-
 ment of the discourses it contains: It compre-
 hends a number of prophecies, delivered on va-
 rious occasions, published at different seasons,
 and afterward collected together by the priests,
 or some other good men, perhaps under the in-
 spection of pious king Hezekiah. Whilst that
 upright prince sat on the throne of Judah, the
 Proverbs of Solomon were copied out by his
 men †; and having collected and transcribed
 them, we may naturally suppose they would

* Page 87.

† Prov. xxv. 1.

not allow the Prophecies of Ifaiah to lie neglected. The feveral prophecies are diftinguifhed by the titles prefixed to them, the fubjects of which they treat, or the time in which they were delivered, excepting the laft, contained in the fortieth, and following chapters to the end; the diftribution of which is not fo eafily afcertained, as it is not divided into parts by the prophet, nor marked by infcriptions, and feems to be one continued compofition.

The whole prophetical part may be divided (according to the learned Vitringa*, to whose excellent Commentary I acknowledge myfelf much indebted for affiftance in the following Lectures) into twenty-five difcourfes; fixteen of which are recorded in the firft thirty-five chapters; the other nine are contained in the fortieth, and twenty-fix chapters that follow to the end. The hiftorical part occupies the thirty-fixth, thirty-feventh, thirty-eighth, and thirty-ninth chapters.

The prophecies may be diftributed into five parts, in the manner following:

1. The firft twelve chapters, from the firft to the twelfth inclusive, comprize five prophetic difcourfes, addreffed to the Jews and the ten tribes, whom the prophet, in different ways, reprehends, reprovcs, directs, and comforts.
2. The next twelve chapters, from the twelfth to the twenty-fourth inclusive, contain eight difcourfes; in which are narrated the various fortunes of the Babylonians, the Philiftines, the

* Prologom. page 24.

Moabites, the Syrians, the Assyrians, the Ethiopians, the Egyptians, the Arabians, and Tyrians.

3. The eleven chapters that follow, from the twenty-fourth to the thirty-fifth inclusive, comprehend a song of triumph, and three long sermons, describing the awful judgments and calamities which were to be inflicted on the incorrigible Jews, the enemies of the church of Christ; with which are interspersed many precious promises, directed to the peculiar people of God.

4. The ten chapters which intervene, from the thirty-ninth to the forty-ninth inclusive, relate four consolatory discourses; in which the advent of the great Messiah is foretold; the signs, the circumstances, and effects of his appearance are marked; and the great deliverance he should accomplish for the church is predicted.

5. In the last seventeen chapters, from the forty-ninth to the end, are recorded five excellent discourses, abounding with the richest imagery and most beautiful figures, exhibiting the various vicissitudes and fortunes of the person and kingdom of Jesus Christ; with which the prophecy concludes.

The historical part, which is comparatively short, occupies the thirty-sixth, thirty-seventh, thirty-eighth, and thirty-ninth chapters. It is employed in describing some remarkable occurrences of the times in which Isaiah sustained the character of a prophet of the Lord, connected with the leading subjects treated in this prophecy. Agreeable to this analysis, I proceed in the following Lectures.

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With respect to the plan on which they are executed: The first and principal business of a lecturer, according to my notion of expository exercises or lectures (as we call such discourses in Scotland), is to give the plain and literal sense of the words, then to ascertain the meaning of the expression, to elucidate the subject, and afterward to improve it, for instruction, for reproof, for direction, or consolation, as the occasion seems to require. It is of great consequence rightly to understand the phrases and expressions, particularly in the prophetic books, where from the literal are often deduced deep and recondite senses, which depend entirely on the just and accurate interpretation of the words of prophecy. In discussing the parts which seem purely prophetic, it is requisite to explain the import of the phraseology, to show the matter of the prediction, to point out the persons and places to which they refer, and the time when they have been or shall be accomplished. This is highly necessary, that we may understand what is foretold, to whom it shall be fulfilled, when and where its completion may be expected. I am sensible that the application of the prophecies to their corresponding events is attended with considerable difficulties. The obscurity in which they are necessarily involved, the general terms and mixed style in which they are commonly announced, and the hyperbolical strain in which they are often delivered, render them more liable to misinterpretation than other parts of scripture. Besides, inadvertence to the connection whereby events are linked together,

an intermixture of dispensations of providence with things the prophecy seems not to respect, and above all, the different persons, events, and seasons to which the same prediction refers, require this subject to be treated with great modesty and diffidence; especially when we recollect, that, beside the particular person, season, and event, to which the prophecy more directly points, it may have a more distant reference to others of still higher importance, or it may receive a continued completion through a long series of time. From the applications of the ancient prophecies by the writers of the New Testament, we see they admit of a very different interpretation from what may be thought to be the primary and immediate view of the prophets themselves. This accomplishment of prophecy in more events than one, in the same system, at different periods, forms that *double sense*, which, far from giving offence, ought to excite our admiration, and establish our faith in the divine testimony, convinced that the expositions which some imagine to be different senses of the same scripture, are indeed no more than parts of one full complete sense which properly belongs to it.

“The student,” says the pious Dr. Horne, in his excellent Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms, “who is desirous of farther information
 “upon a subject so curious, so entertaining,
 “and so interesting, as that of the figurative
 “language of scripture, the principles on which
 “it is founded, and the best rules to be observed
 “in the sober and rational interpretation of it,
 “ may

“ may find satisfaction by consulting the following authors :

“ Lowth’s Preface to his Commentary on the Prophets.

“ Lowth’s Prælect. de Sacr. Poef. Heb. Prælect. iv.—xii.

“ Hurd’s Introduct. to the Study of the Prophecies, Serm. ii. iii. and iv.

“ Pascal’s Thoughts, Sect. x.—xiv.

“ Vitringa Observat. Sacr. Lib. vi. Cap. xx. et Lib. vii.

“ Vitringa Præfat. ad Comment. in Ifaiam.

“ Glaffii Philologia Sacra, Lib. ii.

“ Witfii Miscellan. Sacr. Tom. i. Lib. iii. Cap. iii. Lib. ii. Differt. i. ii.

“ Witfii Œconom. Fœd. Lib. iv. Cap. vi.—x.

“ Waterland’s General Preface to Scripture Vindicated.”

To which I subjoin with pleasure, Horne’s Preface to his Commentary on the Pſalms.

These Lectures were delivered to a small congregation in the country, with the design of promoting their acquaintance with the sacred oracles, of impressing their minds with the great truths they contain, and of directing them to the proper improvement they ought to make of their knowledge. I now present them to the inspection of the Public, with no self-interest in view, with no spleen to gratify, with no sinister purposes to serve, but with a sincere love of truth, and an affectionate desire of advancing the study of the scriptures, and the salvation of men. If I shall be so happy as to attain these ends,

ends, I shall have a most ample recompence of my labour, and shall be more indifferent to the praise or censure which may be bestowed on these well-meant endeavours to serve the best interests of mankind. I hope, however, that this publication, though in many respects deficient, may induce others, who have more time and greater abilities, to adopt this useful method of illustrating scripture, and to do greater justice to the subject of these Lectures. A work of this sort being uncommon, it must be proportionally difficult; a circumstance which, in some measure, ought to apologize for the faults and deficiencies that attend its execution.

With respect to style and composition, it becomes me rather to supplicate indulgence than claim applause. Some write for the learned and more polite: I lectured, and now write, for the benefit of the plain and more unpolished class of men, whose spiritual interests deserve equal attention. According to my abilities, I have endeavoured to express myself in plain scriptural language, affecting neither the ornaments of diction, nor elegance of manner, which would not have suited my audience.—With regard to the subject and matter of these discourses, I cheerfully submit them to the perusal of those who are pleased to read them: far from pretending to dominion over their faith, or imposing my sentiments as the rule or measure of their judgment, I humbly suggest what, in my opinion, appears to be the true meaning and design of the inspired writer. I trust the candid Reader will not judge of them by a detached view of the

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the explanation given of any particular passage of scripture, concerning which I may be mistaken. To judge fairly, and pronounce justly of this performance, the general nature, the uniform tenour, and professed design, must be examined with candour, and proper allowance made for the inaccuracies and errors that may have escaped the author, which he will be ready to correct, when they are pointed out to him. Having lectured on the whole Prophecies of Isaiah, I now publish, with some measure of diffidence and sollicitude, this volume, as a specimen of the work, which would require about four volumes more to comprehend what remains of the exposition. I fondly hope, that this sample, which I now offer to the public inspection, will prove, through the divine blessing, acceptable and useful to some of those who are pleased to peruse it. Should they experience half the pleasure in reading, which I enjoyed in composing and delivering these Lectures, my labour will not be lost, and their time and expence fully compensated.

Those who think that every one ought to be his own interpreter of scripture, will no doubt consider this as an unnecessary and useless publication. I acknowledge, that the word of God is its own interpreter; that the obscure passages are best illustrated by those which are more clear and perspicuous; and that those which are so plain as to require little or no exposition, throw light upon texts which are more difficult and hard to be understood: notwithstanding I affirm, that Christians may derive much benefit from
 writings

writings of this sort well executed, and be greatly assisted in understanding the meaning, connection, and design of the sacred books; and therefore they ought thankfully to receive them, and diligently improve them, in humble dependence on the divine blessing.—Those also who are provided with the best Commentaries that have been written by learned men on the scriptures, may be of opinion, that this work might have been suppressed, as there are already so many expositions of the Bible. Though it may be of small benefit to them who are furnished with good libraries, it may be of considerable use to those who, not possessed of this advantage, are desirous of being assisted in understanding the prophecies of the Old Testament, and in tracing their connection with the gospel of Jesus Christ. For such these discourses are especially intended, though I hope they will be found not unworthy of the attention of others, whose approbation I would highly esteem, and am solicitous to obtain. I conclude, by earnestly recommending this performance to the kind patronage and divine benediction of that God, to the advancement of whose glory, and to the good of whose people, it is humbly dedicated.



LECTURES

ON THE

PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH.

CHAP. I.

THE vision of Ifaiah the fon of Amos, which he faw concerning Judah and Jerufalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

These words, which feem to have been originally prefixed to the predictions recorded in this chapter, were afterward considered as the title of the whole facred book. The infpired Writer of the Second Book of Chronicles exprefsly refers to this divine compofition, as well known by the name which is given it in this verfe *. The infcription informs us—in what manner these prophecies came from God—who was the highly favoured perfon to whom they were communicated—who were the people whose fortunes they chiefly related—and in what period of time Ifaiah was employed in the prophetic office.

The Most High God hath been graciously pleased in times past, to speak in divers manners to his ser-

* 2 Chron. xxxii. 32.

vants the prophets. To a few he discovered his mind, by familiarly conversing with them face to face, as a man with his friend. This intimate intercourse with God Adam enjoyed in paradise, and afterward Moses in the wilderness, who in this respect was honoured above all the prophets*. To some he revealed himself by dreams, in which he afforded them those intimations of his pleasure which he judged proper to communicate. In this manner he disclosed his friendly purposes to the patriarch Jacob, respecting himself and his posterity †. To others he conveyed instruction by visions, in which were exhibited to their view lively representations of those things wherein they were to instruct mankind. In this way the Almighty condescended to make known his will to our prophet; and therefore he calls these prophecies, *The VISION wherewith he was favoured*. The Lord God who spake to our fathers, and who speaks to us by the prophets, presented to him a full view of the interesting subjects which he describes, and gave him the most satisfying discoveries of what he publishes for our benefit. These things were made as plain and evident to him as if he had seen them with his bodily sight. In his prophecies, therefore, he declares unto us, what he heard with his ears, and saw with his eyes, so that with great propriety this inspired book is called, *THE VISION OF ISAIAH*.

The highly favoured person to whom Jehovah revealed the lively oracles which we are now to consider, and whom he employed to communicate them to his people, was Isaiah, or as he is called in the New Testament, Esaias, which being interpreted, signifies *the salvation of the Lord*. This is a name highly proper for that prophet by whom God was to give the knowledge of salvation, and on whom he conferred the distinguished honour of delineating the cha-

* Deut xxxiv. 10.

† Gen. xxviii. 12. *et seq.*

rafter of the great Redeemer, and the complete redemption he was to obtain.

Names were anciently imposed on children by their parents, not only for the sake of distinction, but to express their hopes and desires respecting them; and we learn from scripture, that they were often given, by divine direction, exactly descriptive of the character of the persons who received them. Among the many instances that might be adduced, I only mention that of Solomon, whose name signifies *peace*; and accordingly, in his days, God gave peace and quietness to Israel. In like manner, our prophet fully answered the name which, by the direction of divine providence, he had received. He spake more fully and clearly than the prophets who had gone before him, of that illustrious Person, who is eminently distinguished as the salvation of Jehovah, and of those signal deliverances which afforded striking representations of his great salvation; whilst, in some respects, he was an instructive figure of him who was to come. He seems to have been possessed, in an eminent degree, of wisdom and holiness, of eloquence, zeal, and fidelity in discharging the duties of his office, and of extensive authority and influence over the people among whom he lived. He was honoured and respected at court, when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded the land of Judah; being the only man mentioned, who with Hezekiah, prayed and cried to Heaven for deliverance; and being sent to in that season of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy, he returned the prince a most comfortable message from the Governor among the nations. Nor was he less remarkable for his powerful influence with the God of the whole earth, who, in answer to his supplication, gave the Jewish monarch a sign of his certain recovery from the depths of distress, by bringing back the shadow ten degrees, by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz. To this short account of the character of our prophet, I may add, he was not
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only a prophet, but a historian, who, as we are told, 2 Chron. xxvi. 22. wrote the acts of king Uzziah's reign, first and last; though that history, with many others, not among the canonical books of scripture, are long ago buried in the ruins of time.

The son of Amoz. It is unnecessary, and would be unprofitable, to inquire into the character, the station, and employment of our prophet's father; and therefore I shall not occupy your time, in reciting the various conjectures which have been formed on these subjects. It is sufficient to remark, that he was probably a respectable person, of considerable rank, and high reputation among his countrymen: and at the time this prophecy was written, it might be very proper to distinguish Isaiah, by the character of the son of Amoz, from others of the same name. Indeed it was frequently the custom of the posterity of Abraham, to mention not only the names of men themselves, but of their fathers; of which innumerable instances occur in the word of God.

Which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. These were the subjects to which the following predictions relate. In the primary sense of the words, their inhabitants, who belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with the Levites residing among them, were doubtless intended, in distinction from Ephraim, which included the other tribes of Israel. Judah was the land they possessed; and Jerusalem was the metropolis of the kingdom, in which their kings and nobles, their judges, priests, and teachers resided, who constituted the most important part of the nation. The people who dwelt in these places, were chosen of God to be the objects of his peculiar care and special protection; their city and country were destined to be the theatre on which the Most High, in the last days, was to display the riches of his grace, by establishing the kingdom of Jesus Christ. As that nation afforded a lively representation of the peculiar people of God under the New Testament, and that city was
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a figure of the Jerusalem that is above, which is the mother of us all, they may be understood here not only in their literal, but in their figurative signification, denoting the church of God under the new and better dispensation of his grace. This is the obvious meaning of Judah and Jerusalem, in several places of the prophetic writings; as in the following passage, where the Lord God promises, ‘ That when he shall perform
 ‘ the good things he hath spoken of to the house of
 ‘ Israel and the house of Judah, in those days Judah
 ‘ shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely *.’ Notwithstanding there are in the prophecies before us, some things relating to Ephraim, to Egypt, to Tyre, and to other nations, Judah and Jerusalem are the chief subject of which they treat; and, it must be remembered, these last-mentioned places include not only what was literally so called in ancient times, but the church of the Living God under the New Testament, to which we professedly belong. This interests us more nearly in this portion of scripture, on which we are now entering, than many are apt to imagine; and supplies us with a powerful argument to engage our serious attention.

In the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. The time during which each of these kings reigned is particularly mentioned in scripture history; and, when added together, make one hundred and twelve or thirteen years. It is evident, Isaiah must have exercised his prophetic office during the whole time in which Jotham and Ahaz sat upon the throne, being thirty-two years †. From what we read in this prophecy, it appears, that he continued in his office until the fourteenth year of Hezekiah; and supposing he was appointed to it so late as two years before Uzziah died, he must have acted in the character of a prophet at least forty-eight years. Some have been of opinion, that he continued

* Jer. xxxiii. 16.

† See 2 Chron. xxvii. 1. and xxviii. 1.

about sixty years in the prophetic office, and lived to the reign of Manasseh: under whose wicked government, according to tradition, he was put to death, being sawn asunder for pretended blasphemy; having declared, that he saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, high and lifted up, and for the sharp reproof administered to the princes of Israel, from the tenth verse of this chapter. Under kings of such opposite dispositions and characters, our prophet would no doubt experience very different treatment, and his instructions would meet with very different entertainment. Whilst Jotham and Hezekiah, who were good kings, sat on the throne of Judah, Isaiah would certainly enjoy much of their support and countenance in the execution of his important office: whereas in the time of Ahaz, remarkable for his impiety, he probably suffered much discouragement and opposition from that wicked prince, who shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and erected altars to idols, notwithstanding all the divine eloquence our prophet employed in stemming the torrent of corruption.—Let us remember, what is addressed to Israel is also spoken to us; that the Lord God is addressing us from his holy temple; and therefore it becomes us, with reverence, to attend to this sure word of prophecy, and to improve it, through the divine blessing, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, that, like men of God, we may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The prophecy recorded in this chapter stands single, and unconnected with those which follow; and affords a beautiful specimen of the prophet's elegant and forcible manner of writing. It contains a warm remonstrance against the heinous crimes, and abounding corruptions, of the perfidious and hypocritical, professing people of God;—most animated exhortations to repentance, and a speedy return to duty, drawn from the contemplation of their present calamities, and imminent danger of desolating judgments;

ments;—with most reviving encouragements to the faithful servants of the Most High, derived from the agreeable prospect of better times, after deserved calamities should be inflicted on the unfaithful and rebellious, and the promised blessings of divine grace communicated.

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

The blessed God is here introduced, entering a solemn charge and public complaint against his disobedient people, on account of their base neglect and ingratitude, to the truth and equity of which the whole world is summoned to attend and bear witness. The word translated *heavens* may be derived from one that signifies *a name of honour and dignity*; and so it intimates, that the heavens are the most beautiful, glorious, and renowned part of creation. It may be compounded of an adverb of *place*, and a word signifying *waters*; and then it informs us, that God hath therein laid up large store of waters, which he seasonably communicates to this earth. It may be deduced from a word that signifies *height* or *elevation*, in respect of place; and serves to remind us of what is obvious to view, that the heavens are the highest and most lofty parts of the universe: or it may come from one that signifies *to be astonished*; instructing us, that if we steadily contemplate the heavens, we shall have good reason to be filled with wonder at the immensity and beauty, the magnificence and regularity of that spacious fabric.—The word rendered *earth* seems to be derived from one that signifies *to run, to be in a state of activity and motion*; and may denote, that this earth is in continual motion; that men, and its other inhabitants, in performing their several functions, are in perpetual activity.

vity. These different parts of creation, with their numerous inhabitants, are here solemnly invited, to attend to the important truth the prophet is about to declare. Ye celestial spirits, who are the spectators of human actions, and contemplate the conduct of men, listen to the astonishing representation now to be laid before you! Ye men of God, to whom this earth is given for a possession, who are endued with the principles of just perception and sound judgment, men of every character and condition, who feel the influence of truth and equity, hearken to the word of the Lord! And ye in the inferior ranks of creation, who, though incapable of understanding and judgment, perform your operations according to the laws given you, witness, as you can, the unbounded kindness of Jehovah toward his people, and their wretched ingratitude toward him! This solemn manner of address is frequently used by the prophets, to awaken diligent attention to what they are about to deliver. With a similar introduction Moses begins his sublime song, recorded Deut. xxxii. in which he testifies against the Israelites for their disobedience; ‘ Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and ‘ bear, O earth, the words of my mouth.’ The mighty God, by the prophet David, summons all mankind to attend to his appeal*. And the prophet Jeremiah, expostulating with the Jews, as to their unnatural revolt from God, exclaims in these words, ‘ Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord †.

The heavens and the earth are here invited, to *bear, and give ear*. The latter of these expressions serves to explain the former, whilst the repetition of the call points out the high importance, and indispensable necessity, of compliance with this requisition. The words of the wisest of men often deserve but little regard, whereas the dictates of eternal wisdom

* Psalm l. 1.

† Jer. ii. 12.

and truth justly merit the closest application of mind of which we are capable; and the call being directed to us in particular, demands our serious attention, and prompt obedience.—Let us then turn away our eyes and ears from seeing and hearing vanity, and hearken diligently to him who causeth us to hear his glorious voice. Let us earnestly supplicate the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, to give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, that the eyes of our minds being enlightened, we may be thoroughly acquainted with the things freely given us of God. This is highly requisite to our profiting by the scriptures; for we read, that when our Saviour, after his resurrection from the dead, expounded to his disciples the writings of Moses and the prophets concerning himself, ‘ he opened their understandings to understand the scriptures*’: and since his exaltation into glory, he sends down his Holy Spirit, according to his promise, to lead his followers into all truth; which ought to animate us with the reviving hope of obtaining his gracious illumination and assistance. That we may reap substantial benefit from what God hath spoken, let us be solicitous to get it deeply impressed on our hearts, studying to become intimately acquainted with it, delighting in the discoveries it presents to our view, and laying it up in our hearts, so as to be suitably influenced by it at all times, that we may shew ourselves, ‘ not forgetful hearers, but doers of his word †.’

For the Lord hath spoken. The word *Jehovah*, which in this, and many other places of scripture, is translated *Lord*, signifies, that *he is, and was, and is to come*, and denotes the peculiar manner of existence which is proper to the Most High God, who alone is self-existent. All other beings derive from him their life and breath, and all things; whereas his existence

* Luke xxiv. 45.

† James i. 25.

is necessary and independent, as the name *Jehovah* imports. It is impossible that we, who are finite dependent creatures, can comprehend the idea expressed by this word, as we are utterly unacquainted with necessary infinite existence. Indeed we cannot properly describe in what manner any material object exists with which we are conversant; and therefore it would be the highest presumption, to pretend to explain the existence of God, who is an infinite eternal Spirit. Though exalted far above our most raised apprehensions and praises, and highly provoked by our ingratitude and disobedience, he hath vouchsafed to speak to us. The learned Dr. Lowth, bishop of London, in his new translation of this prophecy, renders this expression, "For it is Jehovah that speaketh;" for which he gives this reason in his Notes, "There seems to be an impropriety of demanding attention to a speech already delivered;" and no doubt there is, had the discourse been already delivered to the persons who are addressed. Both translations seem equally proper, and the reason of attention is equally good, according to the view in which you consider the words. *Hear, and give ear, for* (according to our version) *the Lord hath spoken to me* what I am about to communicate to you, and therefore it deserves the same regard as if you had received it by an audible voice from heaven: or, agreeable to the new translation, for it is "the Lord that speaketh;" though you hear only the voice of a fellow mortal, the words come from the Eternal God, who stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth. We have here a remarkable instance of that metaphorical kind of speech which frequently occurs in scripture, wherein the faculties of men are attributed to God, and his manner of acting, otherwise unknown to us, is expressed by a sensible familiar image. Jehovah hath spoken to men in various ways; sometimes by forming a distinct audible voice in the air, as at the baptism of our Saviour; and at other times

times through the medium of the prophets, as in the case before us. In whatever manner the Lord spake to our prophet, the fact is here ascertained in general terms, he hath spoken.—Though this declaration immediately refers to the prophecy contained in this chapter, we may consider it as extending to all the predictions of this book. This affords a powerful argument, to engage our closest attention to the subject on which we are entering. It is Jehovah who speaks to us, by the prophet Isaiah, on matters of the highest importance, in which we are deeply interested; and therefore we ought to attend to them with the utmost diligence and care.

I have nourished and brought up children. These, and the following words, contain the heavy charge which God, by the prophet, brought against his professing people of old, wherein he contrasts the distinguishing favours he had conferred upon them with their undutiful conduct toward him. The people primarily intended, whom God nourished and brought up, were the Jews, to whom our prophet was sent with this message, to whom pertained the adoption and the covenants, the glory, the giving of the law, and the promises. They were repeatedly spoken of under the description of children, and encouraged, by the consideration of this character, to the performance of their duty. With this view their lawgiver assured them, ‘Ye are the children of the Lord your God* :’ and when recounting the benefits which the Lord had conferred upon them, and would farther bestow, he thus addressed them in the song, recorded Deut. xxxii. ‘Is not he thy Father that bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee.’ From this intimate relation, they were taught to expect the certain accomplishment of the precious promises that were given them; for God thus speaks, by the prophet Jeremiah, ‘I will cause them to walk

* Deut. xiv. 1.

‘ by the rivers of waters, in a straight way, wherein
 ‘ they shall not stumble : for I am a father to Israel,
 ‘ and Ephraim is my first-born *.’ In every respect did Jehovah act toward that people as a wise and tender-hearted father, never failing to perform all the duties arising from that endearing relation which were suitable to their condition. Their adoption, however, was only external and typical of that gracious spiritual adoption, to which all the peculiar people of God are admitted under the New Testament.— This instructs us, who are professedly the children of God, in a higher sense than those against whom the accusation before us was originally laid, of our intimate concern in what is here written.

These expressions, I have nourished and brought them up, may be considered, as including all those innumerable benefits which Jehovah conferred on the posterity of Abraham, from the time he formed them to be his people, until they reached their full stature, in the days of David and Solomon. Notwithstanding the means employed to crush and oppress them, he increased and multiplied them exceedingly ; he watched over them with a parent’s care, and provided for them with a parent’s liberality ; he conducted them safely through the dangers of the desert ; he fed them with bread from heaven, and water from the rock ; he protected them from their numerous powerful enemies ; he instructed them by his servants, by his statutes and judgments, and his good Spirit ; he chastened them from time to time, as a father doth his children ; and honoured them with the symbols of his gracious presence. After having thus trained them up under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the Father, and assigned them the glory of all lands as their inheritance, he elevated them to a most flourishing and prosperous condition in the days of David, and Solomon his son, subduing their

* Jer. xxxi. 9.

enemies before them, and investing them in the possession of the promised land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates. Having erected among them the most magnificent structure that ever beautified this earth as the place of his worship, and established among them the most excellent laws and sacred institutions for their benefit, he advanced them to the highest pitch of worldly splendour and glory, under the reign of the wisest of men, and the greatest of princes that ever swayed a sceptre; so that they became the admiration and envy of surrounding nations. In this manner, he afforded them a lively instructive representation of the invaluable spiritual privileges he confers on his children under the New Testament, who enjoy the substance of all the good things thereby typified. This distinguished honour belongs to all you, who, being born of God, are his obedient children, growing up in all things to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

And they have rebelled against me. What an ungrateful return to their gracious Father for such multiplied kindnesses! What an affecting scene does this accusation present to our view! The expression denotes, that they not only forsook him, and renounced his service, but they opposed him, and became his adversaries. In what numberless instances did the men of Judah rebel against the Lord, by oppressing the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, by perverting righteousness in judgment, by practising deceit and violence, by committing forbidden impurities, and dealing perfidiously with God. The charge may refer, in a particular manner, to the abominable idolatries to which they were greatly addicted, which contained a professed public denial of the true God, joined with an avowed contempt of his glory and authority. This spirit of defection from the God of their fathers very early discovered itself on various occasions, as in the instance of Korah and his company, and many others I stay not to mention. Toward
the

the conclusion of Solomon's reign it began to appear anew; and under the reign of his son Rehoboam it grew more prevalent and conspicuous, until that memorable period in which we are informed, 'That prince forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him,' as we read, 2 Chron. xii. 1. Still it increased to the days of Ahaz, when it arrived at such a prodigious height, that the public worship of the Living God was neglected, the temple was profaned, reverence and obedience to Jehovah were laid aside, the priests and Levites joined the bulk of the people in the revolt, the external beauty of their worship was lost, and exchanged for the most odious superstition and abominable practices. What complicated wickedness is contained in such conduct, which exhibits to view the vilest ingratitude, the most insolent pride, the most sottish stupidity, and the highest contempt of God's supreme authority and multiplied favours!—It deserves our special attention, that the history of the posterity of Jacob, to which I have now referred, is a mirror which holds up our character and behaviour, and represents them to the life. Like them, brethren, in numberless instances, as a church and nation, and as individuals, we have rebelled against the Lord, who hath nourished and brought us up. Our iniquities testify against us, and bear evidence to the truth and justice of this heavy charge, with which it becomes us to be deeply affected.

3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his masters crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

In these words the subject contained in the former verse is amplified and illustrated, the insensibility and ungrateful conduct of the professing people of God is represented, as worse than that of the most stupid animals toward those who feed them. The ox and the ass, though destitute of understanding, and those admirable

mirable powers whereby men are distinguished from the inferior creation, seem to exceed us in sagacity on many occasions, and from them we receive many instructive lessons. The ox, though a dull heavy animal, the ass, though to a proverb remarkable for its stupidity, yet know their owners who are kind to them, and the crib of their masters where they are fed. There is a peculiar force in the comparison, wherein the blessed God describes his people, as acting not only beneath their dignity, but in a manner worse than the beasts, even the most stupid among them. Though these creatures are fed, not for their own but for their masters benefit; though they are not treated as children, but as beasts of burden; though they are destitute of reason, and oppressed with labours; yet they are not insensible to their benefactors, and the kindness shewn them: whereas the posterity of Israel, admitted, by the favour of God, to be his peculiar people, and promoted to the highest dignity, acknowledged not the Lord their God, but forgot him, and despised his commandments. A Heathen writer observes, “ That men endued with the noble
 “ gift of reason on that account far excel all the brute
 “ creation; and therefore it becomes them to labour
 “ with their utmost vigour, not to pass their life in
 “ silence as cattle, which nature hath formed grovel-
 “ ling, and subject to the belly *.” In the language of a Christian, it becomes them to employ their reason in acknowledging God their Maker, in diligently tracing effects to their causes, in prudently attending to the connection of the means with the ends to which they ought to be subservient.—To this becoming exercise let us be excited by all the blessings of divine providence we enjoy; and, in a peculiar manner, let the people of God, whom he hath redeemed by the blood of his Son, created for himself that they may shew forth his praise, and enriched with the

* Sallust. cap. 1. Bell. Catal.

manifold blessings of his grace, employ themselves with reverence and gratitude in his service, and the pleasing contemplation of his glory.

But Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. The knowledge here meant must be that which is attended with love, approbation, and delight, in which sense it must be understood in several places of scripture; as where it is said, ‘The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous *,’ *i. e.* he approves of it, and delights in it. The consideration here mentioned is nearly of the same import with the knowledge spoken of, and intimately connected with it; denoting that serious meditation, frequent recollection, and affectionate remembrance, which is often inculcated in the word of God. This is the important duty recommended to Israel by Samuel the prophet, where he thus speaks, ‘Consider how great things the Lord hath done for you †.’ Several ancient versions agree in adding the word *me* to this verse ‡; which points out the object of this knowledge and consideration, the person corresponding to the proprietor and master spoken of in the foregoing words, namely the blessed God himself. The import then of the charge contained in this verse seems to be, that Israel, whom Jehovah had chosen from among all the nations of the earth to be his peculiar people, did not love, honour, and worship him, their constant Preserver, their generous Benefactor, and supreme Lord, from whose unmerited bounty all their comforts flowed, and on whom all their salvation depended. They did not contemplate his glory, they did not meditate on his wonderful works, they did not highly esteem his favour, they were not afraid of his righteous displeasure, nor did they view him as the glorious Author of all the prosperity and safety they enjoyed. By their ingratitude, idolatry, and

* Psal. i. 6.
Note on the words.

† 1 Sam. xiii. 24.

‡ See Dr. Lowth’s

other sinful practices, they renounced the sacred obligations whereby they were bound to study the knowledge and obedience of the Living God. He had not dealt with any nation as with them, having preserved them by his kind providence, he instructed them by his servants in the knowledge of their duty, he intrusted them with his holy laws, promised and represented to them in figures and types, that great salvation which the Messiah was to obtain for all people in the fulness of time. What amazing stupidity and ingratitude thus to requite the Lord, who by his benefits excited them to know and consider him!—Let us not think that this conduct was peculiar to God's ancient people. In nothing do we more resemble them, than in their indifference toward God, their insensibility of the divine goodness, and ingratitude for his mercies. If we are acquainted with our hearts, and attentive to our conduct as individuals, we will acknowledge the resemblance; and if we consider our character and behaviour as a people, we must see that the charge I have opened may be brought against us with equal justice, as against those to whom it was primarily directed*.

4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

* Should the illustrations here given of this passage of scripture appear feeble and inadequate to the importance of the subject, the Author, fully sensible of the justice of this remark, begs leave to inform the candid Reader, that this is the first chapter of the Bible of which he tried to give an exposition. Though this part of his commentary might have been much improved, he determined, for reasons that seemed to him sufficient, to present these Lectures to the world in nearly the same dress in which they were delivered from the pulpit. With this apology he trusts that at least some of his Readers will be satisfied. Of those who may still complain, he wishes that some person of superior abilities may be induced to write a better exposition of these prophecies.

After

After the sublime introduction recorded in the foregoing verses, the prophet begins his discourse with an affecting description of the deplorable state of the Jewish nation respecting their moral conduct. On this subject he enters, in the form of a complaint or lamentation, with a mixture of just indignation, expressed by the word *Ah*. In this sense the prophet Ezekiel uses this expression, where he thus speaks, ‘ Ah Lord God, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel *?’—Isaiah addresses them under various descriptions, *sinful nation*, devoted to the practice of iniquity, and addicted to every species of transgression. Though God had adopted them to be his children, exalted them to heaven in privileges, and commanded them to be holy as he is holy, they committed with greediness all manner of iniquity, insomuch that as a people they richly deserved this character. Viewing them in their national capacity as rulers, and those that were ruled, as teachers, and those that were taught, one with another, in respect to the worship of God, the administration of justice, the practice of righteousness and charity, this was a just description. What shame and reproach does this character reflect on that people, who were indebted to God for exalting them above others, delivering them from the hands of their enemies, and entering them into covenant with himself! How very different their condition from what it would have been, had they obeyed the voice of the Lord, and kept his testimonies! Instead of a sinful nation, they would have been a peculiar treasure unto him above all people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. The prophet farther characterizes them, as

A people laden with iniquity. As the corruption and wickedness which crept in among this people was very extensive, and pervaded all ranks, so it was exceedingly aggravated. Sin is here represented, with

* Ezek. xi. 13.

great propriety, as a burden which vexes the consciences of men, oppresses their minds, retards them in the performance of their duty, and by its insupportable weight is ready to crush them to the lowest hell. Under this grievous load the whole creation is said to groan and travail in pain even until now; and those who are sensible of it complain, that it is by far too heavy for them to bear. Laden with this intolerable weight, they must have been in a most deplorable condition, groaning under the most wretched servitude, apprehensive of being visited by the severest calamities.—*A seed of evil doers*, the degenerate offspring of parents who were eminent in transgression, the servants of divers lusts and pleasures. They were descended from those who did the works of their father the devil, and distinguished themselves by their perverse continuance in evil doing. Unaffected with the divine goodness, unawed by the divine authority, unconcerned about approaching judgments, like their fathers, they walked in the counsels of their evil hearts, gratifying their unsubdued corrupt dispositions. Of the justice of this character the writings of Moses and the prophets afford us many lamentable proofs, which I reckon unnecessary at present to adduce.—*Children that are corrupters*, degenerated from the faith and practices of their renowned ancestors, and so widely different from their pious forefathers, that they could no longer be known for the posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Having become corrupt themselves, they also corrupted others; the fatal influence of their bad example, like a dangerous contagion, extended itself far and wide. They were not only sinners before God themselves, but they were the seducers of others; they were not only actuated by the god of this world, but they were become agents who were employed in his interest. This character corresponds to the history in which we read, ‘That under the reign of Jotham the
‘ people

‘ people did yet corruptly *.’ In what follows, the prophet still rises in the description of the corrupt state of the Jewish nation.

They have forsaken the Lord. They shamefully deserted from their allegiance to the God of their fathers, who had loaded them with innumerable benefits; they wickedly burst asunder those powerful obligations whereby he had bound them to his service; they went astray from his blessed ways, and served the blinded idols of other nations, preferring them to God blessed for evermore. Thus ‘ they committed two great evils, forsaking the ‘ fountain of living waters, and hewing out to ‘ themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water †.’ In this manner——*they provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger.* The character here mentioned is frequently given to God by the prophets, and particularly by Isaiah in this prophecy. Hereby he is distinguished from the false gods of the nations; the infinite purity of his nature is expressed, and his intimate connection with his people is pointed out. He is perfectly holy, the great principle and pattern of all true holiness among men. He is holy in all his works, in all the dispensations of his providence, and in all the judgments of his mouth, which bear the impression of his untainted purity. He is the Holy One of Israel, who set them apart for himself as his peculiar treasure, who strictly prohibited every impurity among them, and testified his righteous displeasure against every species of transgression which they committed. He was sanctified among them by that worship which was performed in the beauty of holiness, and he was honoured by that sanctity of manners which is the distinguishing badge of his upright servants. This Holy One they provoked to anger, by blaspheming his name, neglecting his ordinances, breaking his commandments, and following the cor-

* 2 Chron. xxvii. 2.

† Jer. ii. 13.

rupt customs of the nations around them. Thus they incurred his displeasure, and rejected him with contempt. To conclude this affecting description, it is added—*they are gone away backward.* They alienated themselves from the service of that gracious God, who invited them to sacred intercourse with him, and gave them the most salutary counsels. They turned to him the back, and not the face, who called them to glory and virtue, in the enjoyment of whose favour their highest happiness consisted. Instead of making progress in obedience, and advancing in conformity to the will of God, they entered into crooked paths of their own, and went fast backward, until they arrived at a state of lamentable ignorance, idolatry, and wickedness.—Such is the affecting representation the prophet gives of the whole Jewish nation, which exactly corresponds with the history of the times of Ahaz. Under the government of that wicked prince, they grievously revolted from God, the sanctuary of the Most High was neglected, the temple was spoiled of its ornaments, sacrifices were offered to idols, and every species of abominable idolatry was practised, so that we read, ‘They transgressed sore against the Lord *.’—And is it not too obvious, brethren, to require a proof, that this description of the Jewish nation is in some measure applicable to us? Are not we a sinful nation, who have forsaken the Lord, and gone away backward? Our iniquities give incontestable evidence of the justice of the character. Deeply affected with a sense of our sins, whereby we have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, let us, with humility of heart, return unto the Lord, that he may remember with us his covenant, and not cast us away, nor utterly destroy us.

5 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

* 2 Chron. xxviii. 19.

The prophet, in the name of God, here expostulates with the sinful nation described in the preceding verse, concerning their folly and danger. Various methods had been tried without success, to overcome the obstinacy of this rebellious, perfidious people. They had not only been treated with the most tender indulgence, but they had been chastened severely with rods, and weakened with stripes, to bring them to a better temper and practice: but far from being reformed by the means employed for that purpose, they grew more hardened in their wickedness, and more obstinate in their transgressions, whereby they exposed themselves to the most severe judgments. To rouse their attention, and alarm their fears, the inquiry is proposed, *Why should ye be stricken any more?* Why are you so stupid and careless, as not to consider the procuring causes of your calamities, that you may avoid them? and why do you go on in your trespasses, that will expose you to ruin? Do you not see, that the afflictive evils which have befallen you have been the fruits of your transgressions? And if you are sensible of this as you ought, it betrays the most extreme folly to persist in these crimes, which render more severe judgments necessary to bring you back to God and your duty. Why have you become incorrigible under the dispensations of divine providence, and worse by the very means employed to make you better? It is highly proper and necessary, that you seriously consider what answer you can give to such a seasonable and interesting inquiry, that you may be sensible of your wickedness, perversity, and wretchedness.

Ye will revolt more and more. These words describe the perverse disposition of those to whom they were directed. They had already apostatized from the worship and service of the Living God, who had chastened them in various ways, to reduce them to a dutiful subjection to his authority. Their hearts, however, instead of being softened by the chastisements

ments they received, became more obdurate; and their corruptions, far from being subdued, acquired new strength and vigour. Their conduct, far from being reformed and improved, rose to new degrees of impiety and wickedness; in which they were so confirmed, that, though repeatedly stricken, they revolted the farther from God, and alienated themselves the more from his service.—This shews the imminent danger to which revolting from God, our rightful Sovereign, most certainly exposes those who, through evil hearts of unbelief, depart from him. In its first beginnings, which frequently commence with the neglect of some divine institution, or the omission of some commanded duty, of no great apprehended consequence, it is viewed as a trivial matter, in which no farther progress for a time is intended. But men do not commonly stop here: their deceitful and desperately wicked hearts, being withdrawn from God, are quickly attached to the pleasures of sin suited to their corrupt appetites; and their affections, engrossed by hurtful objects, lead them still farther from him, until they are so accustomed to their evil ways, that they remain indifferent under the most alarming judgments. Progress in revolt is down-hill, and frequently proves both easy and rapid. This was the unhappy condition of the Jewish nation, as plainly intimated in the expression before us, *Ye will revolt more and more.* Being set up as a beacon, to warn us of the awful danger of departing from the Living God, keeping them fully in our view, let us beware of following the ruinous course which they steered, from which neither the mercies nor judgments of God could detain them.

The whole head is sick. In this, and the following expressions, the external calamitous state of the Jewish nation is described. The representation is borrowed from the distressed condition of one covered with wounds, afflicted with putrifying sores, whose head is pained, whose heart is faint, whose members are

bruised, and whose distemper, preying on the inward parts, threatens to be mortal. The figure is instructive, and used by the most elegant profane writers. The words then must be explained not in their literal, but in their metaphorical sense, in order to our understanding them aright.—In this view, by the *head* may be meant, the king, the princes, and governors of the people, who were the chief and leading men in the nation. These are, with great propriety, called the *head*, as they were exalted above others to honour and dignity; and to them it belonged to direct and consult, for the benefit of the whole body of the people. The whole head is said to have been sick, no part of it remained sound and free from distempers, but the whole was become feeble and diseased, in a state of languor and imbecility, totally indisposed for rightly performing the part incumbent on it to act.—*And the whole heart faint.* The heart literally denotes that part of the human frame which is the source of life and motion. In the figurative sense, in which it is here to be understood, the high priest, the priests, and sanhedrim, may be intended, who were to the Jewish nation what the heart is to the natural body, giving life and vigour to all its operations, and without whom their church and state would have been destitute of beauty and regular motion. The whole heart is said to have been faint, reduced to a very feeble and languid condition, incapable of performing its proper functions for the benefit of the body. We all know, that the connection between the head and the heart is very intimate; so that what indisposes the one affects the other, and will be soon felt through the whole frame, as is plainly affirmed in the next verse.

6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head, *there is* no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

The

The affecting description of the calamitous state of the Jewish nation, begun in the preceding verse, is here continued. The whole body of the people, all the members of the community, in a figurative sense, were diseased, wounded, and bruised, by the righteous judgments of God, which were inflicted upon them so universally, that neither the highest orders, nor the lowest ranks among them were exempted. Several expressions are used, to represent the various distressing calamities wherewith they were visited, the lamentable effects of their apostacy from God, and the sad evidences of his just displeasure. The very vitals of their constitution were hurt, by the chastisements they had received. They were dangerously bruised, by their fall from their former state of exaltation and dignity. Sores had appeared on them, which had the most painful and dangerous aspect; and, if not cured by a skilful hand, threatened the very destruction of the nation. Viewing them as individuals, their judgments were perverted by prejudices, their understandings were darkened through ignorance, their hearts were hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, their affections were become earthly and sensual, nor did any faculty of their minds escape the infection of sin. These inward distempers discovered their baneful influence through their whole conduct, in the manner we have heard; in consequence of which, their outward condition assumed a very alarming appearance, whilst proper care was not taken to get their distresses cured, and their calamities removed.—This, brethren, affords a just representation of our spiritual state, until the Lord, who healeth all our diseases, cure our spiritual maladies, redeem our lives from destruction, and crown us with loving kindness and tender mercy. Let us therefore apply to him, whose skill and ability no distemper, however inveterate, could ever reproach, that he may give us that relief he is infinitely able to bestow.

They

They have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. No effectual remedy had been properly applied. That wounds may be healed, it is necessary that they be carefully closed and filled up; that bruises may be healed, it is needful that they be tenderly bound up; and in order to putrifying sores being cured, they must be softened with proper ointments. As it is in the natural, so it is in the political body, with regard to which each of these methods, here referred to, must be tried, in expectation of removing the disorders of the state. The wounds made by discords and divisions must be closed, the bruises received by falls from former eminence and dignity must be bound up, and the putrifying sores that have arisen from a diseased constitution ought to be treated with much lenity and attention, that the body politic may be restored to soundness. All these salutary measures, we are informed, had been neglected, with respect to Judah, in the days of Ahaz, to which period this description seems especially to refer.— This portrait, to which I am unwilling any longer to fix your attention, presents to your view a very moving spectacle. An individual of our species placed before our eyes literally in this deplorable condition, would doubtless affect the most insensible heart in this assembly, and bring tears from the eyes of not a few. But we have now been surveying a far more distressing scene than this; a whole nation afflicted with the most complicated evils, oppressed with the most grievous calamities, without so much as one friendly hand stretched out to administer relief. Surely the contemplation of such an object ought to excite your compassion, especially when you recollect, that this affecting description, in its figurative sense, is justly applicable to our spiritual condition, until the loving kindness of God our Saviour appear, in working our salvation, in healing the diseases of our souls, and anointing us with the oil of gladness.

7 Your country *is* desolate, your cities *are* burnt with fire: your land strangers devour it in your presence, and *it is* desolate as overthrown by strangers.

The external calamitous condition of the land of Judah is in this verse farther represented.—*Your country is desolate.* The Hebrew word rendered *desolate* is emphatical, and signifies desolation; and so the expression imports, that the country was so completely laid waste that it was become a perfect desolation. This general proposition is illustrated in what follows, which seems intended to set forth the universal destruction that had overspread the land.—*Your cities are burnt with fire.* They have not only been depopulated, and spoiled of their riches and ornaments by your enemies, but they are consumed by the fires kindled by the rage and fury of your invaders, and now lie buried in ruins.—*Your land strangers devour it in your presence.* Your grounds, which should have supplied your families with food, are ravaged by strangers, who have come in among you, in your very sight, without regard to your being the witnesses of their conduct. Your fruitful fields, which were the beauty and riches of your country, now lie uncultivated and barren; and your vineyards, which afforded you abundance of wine and oil, are become like an unfruitful desert.—*And it is desolate as overthrown by strangers.* Your cities and fields every where bear the marks of the unrelenting fury and hostile power of those strangers who entered your country, with a view to spoil and rapine, and were employed in spreading destruction wherever they came. The Bishop of London renders this clause, “As if destroyed by an inundation,” occasioned by a great fall of rain, which, causing a flood, spreads a general desolation through the land. In either view, the expression is evidently intended, to shew the terrible extensive effects of the powerful invasion which had entered the
land

land of Judah, and made dreadful devastation through the whole country.

This description of the desolate ruined state of that once happy land agrees with the time of Ahaz, when Judea was ravaged by the invasion of Israel, by Syrians from the north, the Edomites from the south, and the Philistines from the west. At that time we are informed, ‘ That the land was spoiled, the cities ‘ were possessed by their enemies, hundred thousands ‘ of the inhabitants were led captive, and one hundred and twenty thousand were slain in one day *.’— How awful does the Almighty appear in the execution of his righteous judgment! How dangerous is apostacy from God, which exposes both to temporal and spiritual calamities; and brings down the dreadful effects of his displeasure, not only on our persons, and the state to which we belong, but also on the land in which we dwell! On account of the sins of them that dwell therein, the Lord God Omnipotent ‘ turneth ‘ rivers into a wilderness, the water-springs into dry ‘ ground, and a fruitful field into barrenness †.’ This affecting consideration ought to teach us, to stand in awe, and not to sin; to beware of provoking him to anger, who can save and destroy to the uttermost.

8 And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

The very solitary and desolate condition of the chief city of Judea is here illustrated by three similitudes.— *And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard.* Zion was the name of a mountain situated on the north of Jerusalem, on which part of that beautiful city was built, and on which stood the magnificent temple of the Lord. By a figure in speech, frequently

* 2 Chron. xxviii.

† Psal. cvii. 33, 34.

used in the Hebrew language, the inhabitants of a city or country are called its daughter. Hence we read of the daughter of Edom, of Tyre, Babylon, and here of Zion. This once flourishing and holy city, the capital of Judea, was now reduced to such a low and deplorable condition, that it resembled a little temporary hut made of turf, branches of trees, and the like materials, in a vineyard, where the fruits were in danger of being spoiled or stolen, in order to shelter the keeper from the weather during the time the fruits were ripening.—This once beautiful city, the joy of the whole earth, was become *like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers*; which were anciently much esteemed, and cultivated by the Egyptians and the Ifraciites. The lodge mentioned, being built merely for the convenience of the gardener, and not for ornament, had a very mean and insignificant appearance, and was an object that was generally overlooked and neglected; and, on these accounts, afforded a striking representation of Zion, in her solitary deserted state.—It is farther compared *to a besieged city*, around which universal desolation hath been spread by the besiegers, that so the inhabitants may derive no advantage from the neighbourhood. In this distressed condition, they are obliged to retire, if possible, to other places: the city ceases to be frequented by strangers, and becomes an object of pity, as well as a seat of danger. By these three similitudes, the forlorn state of Jerusalem, in the days of Ahaz, is represented; all of which seem designed to give affecting views of its meanness and solitude.

How exceedingly different must Zion then have been from what it was in the days of David and Solomon, when the tribes of the Lord went up to the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord; when silver and gold at Jerusalem was plenteous as stones, and cedar-trees as sycamore-trees that are in the vale for abundance! What an instructive warning does this charge afford, of the extreme danger of apostacy from God, and the duties of his worship!

worship! Zion was the city which God had chosen, wherein he put his name, and its inhabitants were a people near unto him, his redeemed ones, who were blessed above all other nations. They were honoured with the temple, the worship, and oracles of Jehovah; they had among them his presence and his prophets; and they were dignified with the names of his glory, and his strength. Notwithstanding, when they rebelled against the Lord, he inflicted upon them the most deolating judgments; and all their boasted privileges could not screen them from destructive calamities. ‘The righteous God made them eat the fruit of their own ways, and filled them with their own devices, whilst fear and guilt, affliction and sorrow, seized upon them.’ Their sins were the causes of those wounds and bruises which they received, and of those putrifying sores wherewith they were distressed.—Being thus instructed what an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from the Lord our God, let us beware of following their corrupt example, lest we incur similar judgments.

9 Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, *and* we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

In these words the reason is assigned, why the men of Judah were not wholly swallowed up by divine judgments. Such was their wretched condition, that, unless the Lord God, merciful and gracious, had averted from them deserved calamities, and preserved among them a few upright worshippers, their nation and church had been ruined altogether. There is a beautiful propriety in speaking of the great God under the magnificent description of the Lord of hosts, when this subject is mentioned, as it suggests one important reason why the whole nation was not destroyed. He who mercifully preserved a remnant of them is the
 Lord

Lord of hosts, who is universal proprietor, and possessed of unlimited dominion, over the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of this earth, having absolute right to dispose of them as seemeth good in his sight. Besides the sun, moon, and stars, the angels are his hosts, whom he employs as the ministers of his divine providence; whose influence over human affairs, and to whose agency, much more is to be ascribed than many are apt to imagine, or willing to allow. They excel in strength; they rejoice in obeying the commands of Jehovah, and in celebrating his praises. He sends them forth to minister to the heirs of salvation; he charges them with their safety; he employs them to comfort them under their distresses, to convey their departing souls to heaven, and at last they shall convene all his elect from every quarter.—All the creatures on earth, all the kingdoms of this world, and particularly his peculiar people, are his hosts. Under this description, the posterity of Abraham are spoken of, Exod. xii. 41. where we are told, ‘That all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt, that he might conduct them to a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations*.’ He is therefore justly called, the Lord of hosts, as all these, indeed all the creatures, are his hosts, and he is their Lord, who mustereth and disposeth of them according to his pleasure.—Concerning this glorious person, it is said, *Except he had left unto us a very small remnant.* These words are cited by the apostle Paul †, with some little variation, when treating of the call of the Gentiles, to shew, that some of the Jews, as well as they, should be among the saved of the Lord. Those whom our prophet calls a remnant, which denotes a few that remain of a large number, the apostle speaks of, as seed which is reserved for being sown after the whole stock of grain is consumed or sold off. Both expressions are evidently of the same import. This small rem-

* Jer. iii. 19.

† Rom. ix. 29.

nant was composed of the escaped in Israel, of those that were left in Zion, and remained in Jerusalem; the little flock, which were as sheep among wolves; the few, that entered in at the strait gate, and walked in the narrow way that leadeth unto life.—This remnant is said to be *left unto us*. God was graciously pleased to set them apart for himself as his peculiar people, whom he called unto holiness, and happily preserved from the general corruption which pervaded the whole nation, especially at the time referred to. This reservation, brethren, was not owing to the superior goodness of this remnant, who were in no respect essentially better than those who were not reserved, but to the sovereign mercy and love of God, who, according to his good pleasure, selected them from among their brethren, to shine as lights in the world, and to shew forth his praises, who called them to virtue and glory. Hence it is called, a remnant according to the election of grace, which excludes boasting, stains the pride of all human glory, and opens a door of hope to the meanest and most unworthy. This circumstance sets before us an illustrious proof, that the Lord our God hath not wholly rejected his people Israel, and that he hath mercy and favour still in reserve for them. This distinguishes them from those who were totally overthrown, as intimated in the following words:

We should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities built in that rich plain, which, in scripture, is compared to the garden of the Lord for beauty and fertility. The men of Sodom, however, were extremely wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly, as doubtless were also the inhabitants of Gomorrah. They most ungratefully forsook the service of the true God, their Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor; they renounced his sacred worship; they burst asunder the bonds of humanity; and, regardless even of natural laws, they abandoned themselves to the most abominable

nable practices. On account of their atrocious wickedness, the Lord destroyed them, and overthrew their cities, by raining fire and brimstone upon them from heaven, making them an example of his righteous displeasure against sin, unto those who should afterward live ungodly. Now, had it not been for the holy remnant whom God left among the Jews, they would have been as eminent in transgression, and advanced to no less dreadful heights of impiety than the inhabitants of these cities. Had it not been on account of this residue of men who sought after the Lord, the judgments inflicted on the Jews might have equalled those which were sent on the cities of the plain, and have proved as destructive, so that none could have escaped: but, for the elect's sake, calamities are mitigated, shortened, and averted, as our Lord himself hath instructed us*. Accordingly, this remnant proved the happy means of stopping the current of wickedness, which threatened to have overspread the whole land with desolating judgments, whilst they sowed the seeds of that goodness and righteousness which is the stability of a nation; and, by their fervent prayers, mercies were intermixed with punishments.—This places them in a very important point of view, which merits our particular attention. They may be accounted, as hath often happened in a time of deep corruption and abounding iniquity, the enemies and troublers of a nation; whereas, in fact, they are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the strength and support of a people, and therefore they deserve to be highly esteemed, and kindly entertained. Whilst we are thankful to the Lord of hosts, that such a remnant is still found among us, let us assiduously endeavour to testify our cordial respect for them by every becoming expression, deeply concerned that they may be happily increased and preserved.

* Matth. xxiv. 22.

10 ¶ Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.

The prophet solemnly demands the attention of those whom he addressed, to what he was about to deliver in the following verses.—The rulers of the Jews he calls, the rulers of Sodom; intimating, that they resembled the governors of that wicked city in luxury and impurity, in pride, oppression, and the other abominations that they committed, of which the prophet Ezekiel speaks in his prophecy*. ‘They not only
‘walked after their ways, and did after their abominations, but, as if that had been a very little thing,
‘they were corrupted more than the men of Sodom in all their ways,’ as that prophet remarks, at the 47th verse of the chapter above cited. On account of this striking similarity of manners between the governors of Sodom and the rulers of the Jews, the latter have the designation of the former here given them with much justice and propriety. By this humiliating appellation, those who presided over the Jewish people are reminded of their deep corruption, and lamentable progress in every species of iniquity, whereby they provoked the Almighty, and ruined themselves.—As for the bulk of the nation, the prophet addresses them as the people of Gomorrah, on account of their striking resemblance, in wickedness, to the wretched inhabitants of that city. According to a figure in speech, frequently used in scripture, we find persons and bodies of men designed by the names of those to whom they bear a remarkable likeness. An instance of this sort occurs in the book of Revelation, where we read, ‘That the dead bodies
‘of our Lord’s two witnesses shall lie in the street of
‘the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and
‘Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified †.’ The

* Ezek. xvi. 50.

† Rev. xi. 8.

apostacy from God, the impiety, the ingratitude, and enormous crimes committed by the people of Judah, made their resemblance to the men of Sodom and Gomorrah complete, and exposed them to no less a punishment than that inflicted upon these cities. Such was their amazing progress in sin, from which neither the light of nature, the dictates of conscience, the promises, the threatenings, and the presence of God, could restrain them. Their metropolis, Jerusalem, was filled with violence and strife; mischief, sorrow, and wickedness were in the midst thereof; deceit and guile departed not from her streets.—Alas! that, in this respect, as a people, we have foolishly followed the example of the Jews, by imitating those who have been notorious transgressors; and, far from acting up to our character as Christians, we have sadly degenerated from the strictness of our former profession and practice.—The attention of these rulers and people is demanded to what follows.

Hear the word of the Lord; give ear to the law of our God. The word of the Lord, and the law of our God, to which attention is required, seem here to be synonymous expressions; in both of which, the message delivered in the following part of this prophecy is intended. They particularly refer, to the reproof administered to the professing people of God, on account of their gross hypocrisy and formality in the duties of divine worship; and the repeated calls given them to the exercise of true repentance, as indispensably necessary to avert the just judgments of Jehovah. Isaiah was perfectly convinced, that what he was about to deliver was indeed the word of Jehovah, and the law of God, which he had communicated to him in such a manner, that he was fully satisfied that it justly deserved these descriptions. In order, therefore, to awaken the most solemn attention to the truths he had received in commission to deliver, he declares, that we are not to hear the word of man, but the word of the Living God, whom we are bound,
by

by the strongest ties, to reverence and obey. Some learned men have observed, that there are ten different names given to this supreme Lawgiver in scripture: three of which denote his eternal independent existence; three of them are expressive of his glorious power; three of them signify his universal government; and one of them points out his supreme excellence, and high exaltation. The word here translated *God* is in the plural number, in which it frequently occurs in the Old Testament, and is supposed to be derived from one that signifies *mighty* or *strong*. This reminds us, that the law, to which we are called to give ear, proceeded from the Almighty, who is able to save and to destroy, and consequently merits the most serious consideration. From what follows, it appears, that the prophet especially intended, the law given by Moses to the people of Israel respecting the worship of Jehovah. In this view, the import of the invitation before us will be to this effect: Ye rulers, and men of high rank, who may imagine ye are exempted from concern in this message, I call for your attention in the first place. And as men are ever prone to consider the word of God as directed rather to others than themselves, ye who are the people may think it wholly relates to your rulers, I therefore next call on you to give audience. Harken then ye, of every condition, who pretend to observe the institutions and sacrifices enjoined in the law of the Lord, and I will shew you the sum, the spirit, and design of that law, which was not intended merely to require you to present before the Most High numerous offerings, to observe many solemnities, and to make many prayers, with the performance of which, if ye are satisfied, ye neglect its chief aim. Besides prefiguring future good things, it was promulgated, to direct you to worship the Lord our God with pure hearts and clean hands, in the faith of the accomplishment of his promises; and to lead you to evidence that faith, by a strict regard to justice and charity through the whole of your conduct.

Either

Either ye do not know and consider this, or ye wilfully pervert the law of God to the worst of purposes.—I beseech you then, brethren, diligently to take heed to the salutary instructions contained in the subsequent part of this prophecy. Though they were not primarily addressed to you, they are written for your learning; and from them, through the divine blessing, you may derive much benefit.

II To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

In answer to an objection that might naturally occur to the justice of the preceding charge, drawn from the multitude of sacrifices presented to God by his ancient people, the prophet informs them, that the offerings which they brought could not be acceptable to Jehovah. The word translated *sacrifices* denotes all those victims, which, having been slain, and laid on the altar, were in part, or altogether, offered unto the Almighty. It is here inquired concerning these sacrifices, To what purpose were they multiplied? In the law of Moses, various animals, such as oxen, rams, goats, and lambs, were appointed to be offered in sacrifices, and required to be often repeated on different occasions. In obedience to that law, sacrifices continued to be presented to the Lord by the people, to whom this inquiry is proposed, respecting the end they had in view in their offerings. They were not demanded on account of any intrinsic worth or excellence of which they were possessed, or on account of any pleasure or benefit that could accrue to God from them, however numerous and expensive they might be to the offerers. The rites contained in the ceremonial law were intended, to preserve the posterity of Israel from the idolatrous practices of neighbouring nations,

nations, to which they were remarkably prone; to excite in them the expectation of good things which were to come; and to point out to them in what manner the Lord of all would be worshipped. At the time referred to, that people presented multitudes of sacrifices unto Jehovah, regardless of the dispositions and designs with which they brought them; and therefore reproof is administered to them, by the inquiry here proposed.—This question, my friends, we ought to consider as directed to ourselves, respecting the sacrifices of praise, and of doing good, required of us under the New Testament; and it ought to remind us, of the high importance of attending to the designs we have in view in discharging the duties of divine worship. It is by no means sufficient, that they be regularly performed, without considering the end at which we aim. Not only should our actions proceed from good principles, and be good in themselves, but they must be done for valuable and important purposes; not to gratify our own humour, not to promote our self-interest, not to comply with custom, or to obtain the applause of others, but to testify our subjection to the divine authority, to acquire the divine approbation, and to advance our best interests.

I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. It is true, these several kinds of offerings were instituted by the blessed God himself, to typify, in different respects, the one perfect sacrifice of the great Messiah, which was to be offered in the fulness of time; and to represent the indispensable necessity of atonement and purification, in order to the enjoyment of the divine favour. Among the various sacrifices offered by the children of Israel, the burnt-offerings only are here mentioned, which were ordered to be entirely consumed on the altar whereon they were presented, no part of them being reserved, either to the person who brought the
victim,

victim, or to the priest who sacrificed it, excepting only the skin. Though the sacrifice of expiation, the peace-offering, and the sacrifice of thanksgiving, are not particularly mentioned, they are doubtless included in the offerings of fat beasts, which the Lord saith he rejected and loathed; which seems to be the import of the expression, *I am full*. He had not to reprove them for the fewness of their sacrifices and burnt-offerings, which they brought continually before him, but for their hypocrisy and formality in his service. If you inquire, How the great God could reject those sacrifices which he himself had appointed? The answer is obvious: Their rejection proceeded not from want of divine institution, for they originated from his own authority; and the offerings of the people, under that dispensation, were presented in compliance with the command of God, who strictly enjoined them, and always approved of them when rightly performed. They were abhorred, on account of the formality and hypocrisy wherewith they were offered, their being foolishly preferred to the spiritual obedience due to the moral law, and trusted to for righteousness by many, who looked upon them as the foundation of their acceptance with God. They were always well-pleasing to the divine Majesty, when presented with holy dispositions of heart, in reference to the great objects they were intended to represent; but when offered by sinners, who, under the mask of hypocrisy, held fast their iniquities, and discovered no becoming regard to the ends of their institution, he declares, in the words before us, he was full of them.—Let us then, in all the exercises of divine worship, endeavour to act under the influence of this interesting truth, ‘The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, whereas the prayer of the upright is his delight.’ It is the heart of the worshipper that he principally regards; and all the external homage which does not proceed from love to God, and a sacred regard to

his authority, is only vain oblation, which can never ascend before his throne with acceptance.

12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts ?

The hypocritical people to whom God, by the prophet, directed this discourse, continued to attend the ordinances of divine institution, and regularly to appear before the Lord in the duties of his worship; and therefore rashly concluded, they merited the favour of God, and were accepted of him. The appearances referred to, might be either those which were more ordinary and frequent, when they were employed in the daily and weekly exercises of divine worship, or those which were more seldom and solemn, when, three times in the year, all the males appeared before the Lord their God. In order to administer just reproof for their improper conduct, and the unsuitable manner in which they made these appearances, the inquiry before us is proposed, in which the prophet expostulates with them concerning their sin and folly. *Who hath required this at your hands, &c.* The Most High had expressly commanded them to appear before him on many occasions, and particularly specified in what manner they ought to approach his sacred presence. Their careless inattention to this last-mentioned circumstance gave occasion to the challenge contained in this verse. You who were never cleansed from your sins, who have not returned to the Lord in the exercise of sincere repentance, and whose hearts are far from him, whilst you profess much love to him with your mouths, can you possibly imagine, that the all-perfect and most holy Jehovah would command you to tread his courts, whilst you only bring thither your bodies, and leave your hearts behind you? Be assured, that he never required you to approach the courts of his house in such an unholy
and

and hypocritical manner, and that he will never accept or approve of such dissimulation. It is your hearts which he chiefly regards, and justly claims, without which all your specious appearances, all your numerous oblations, are not well-pleasing to the Lord. You may be sensible, that your hearts, far from delighting in his service, which is honourable and glorious, are continually going out after their covetousness, and wandering after earthly objects. And can you think that the Holy One of Israel will accept of such worshippers, who, though they have a male in their flock, which is his peculiar property, yet offer to the Lord a corrupt thing, and only present to him the formal homage of a corruptible body, destitute of a purified heart?—Permit me from hence to inculcate upon you, my hearers, the high importance of performing the service of God in the manner he requires. Being infinitely holy, he hates the least impurity in his worship; being very jealous, the smallest deviation from duty awakens his awful displeasure. Moses, for his rashness, in not exactly executing the divine command, was excluded from the land of Canaan; and many of the Corinthians, on account of the unworthy manner in which they partook of the Lord's supper, became weak and sickly. Instructed of your danger, by such alarming instances as these, labour to get your hearts brought into an unreserved subjection to the divine authority, and to serve God in the lively, spiritual manner he requires, that, along with outward respect, he may have the inward homage of renewed hearts. Thus evidence yourselves to be the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, who have no confidence in the flesh, and rejoice in Christ Jesus.

13 Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new-moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with, *it is iniquity*, even the solemn meeting.

The

The hypocritical people to whom our prophet was sent are here informed, that their oblations and solemn feasts were as offensive to God as their sacrifices.— The oblations mentioned were probably the offerings of the first-fruits, and the tithes of wheat and bread, wine, oil, and salt, with a variety of other things, which were ordered, by divine appointment, to be brought to the tabernacle, and afterward to the temple, that they might be presented unto God by the priests. These are called vain and unprofitable, being offered destitute of regard to the divine authority whereby they were commanded, of that supreme love to Jehovah with which every act of obedience ought to be accompanied, and without faith in the great objects concerning which they were designed to convey instruction. These oblations being separated from the exercises of repentance, prayer, and thanksgiving, had in them nothing spiritual and valuable, that was worthy of God, acceptable to him, or that could be useful to the offerer. The Lord therefore required his professing people, to bring no more such unprofitable offerings to him. He did not order them to refrain from bringing their oblations to the place appointed, but to bring no more such as were unavailable for the purposes intended by them. He would have them punctually to bring those offerings that might be advantageous to them, whereas he expressly forbids them to continue any longer performing what was to them a wearisome and unmeaning service, that could be attended with no good consequences.—To impress this the deeper upon their minds, it is added, *Incense is an abomination unto me.* Incense was a rich perfume, prepared of sweet spices, which was commanded to be put on the fire laid on the altar of gold before the Lord, and to be burnt thereon continually, in order to represent the perpetual, acceptable intercession of Jesus Christ. This incense, though prepared according to divine direction, and offered on the altar which was commanded, God declares

clares was an abomination to him. Whilst the men of Judah foolishly imagined, that the Almighty was delighted with the fragrancy of the spices of which it was composed, and entertained apprehensions of him inconsistent with his infinite majesty and perfect purity, he assures them, that incense was detestable to him, and the object of his just abhorrence.—From whence we learn this important lesson, That the abuse of things, in themselves most valuable, in the worship of God, will render it odious to him, and provoke him to testify, how hateful those services are in his sight which are performed under the influence of formality and hypocrisy. Every thing in divine worship is vain, and offensive to the Most High, which is not executed in the spiritual manner he hath required. This circumstance ought to render us exceedingly cautious in every part of his service, most attentive to the offerings we present before him, and solicitous that they may be acceptable in his sight through the intercession of Jesus Christ.

The new-moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. The new-moons were the days on which the moon was first seen after the change, which was to the children of Israel the beginning of their months. At these seasons they were ordered to offer unto the Lord an additional burnt-offering, a meat-offering, drink-offerings, and a sin-offering, beside their daily sacrifices*. These times were observed by them with peculiar marks of sanctity, and abstinence from ordinary labours, as is plainly intimated in the language of the oppressors, recorded by the prophet Amos, ‘When will the new-moon be gone, that we may sell corn, &c. †’—The Sabbaths are next mentioned: by which we may understand the seventh day of the week, when additional sacrifices were appointed to be offered besides

* See Numb. xxviii. 13. *et seq.*

† Amos viii. 5.

those that were daily presented. These Sabbaths were commanded to be kept holy to the Lord, as days of sacred rest, and types of that eternal Sabbathism which remaineth for the people of God. The Sabbath of years may be also considered as alluded to in this expression; that is, every seventh year, when the land lay uncultivated, the debts of their brethren were discharged, and servants set at liberty.—To these are added, the calling of assemblies; the solemn convocations which were held on the 10th day of the seventh month, which they were appointed to observe as a public fast, on which they were to afflict their souls for sin, and to do no work. On these solemn occasions, the priest was to make an atonement for them, to cleanse them from all their sins, and to make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, for the tabernacle of the congregation, for the altar, for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. This was indeed a solemn meeting, as it is called in the last clause of the verse. What could be more solemn, than to see the whole numerous people of Israel and Judah convened for the purposes of afflicting their souls, and making atonement for their sins before the Lord?—Concerning these seasons and assemblies, God saith,

I cannot away with them, it is iniquity. By these expressions, God declares his aversion to the offerings and festivals of the men of Judah, and suggests the reason of their offensiveness to him. It is not difficult to perceive their import, which seems to be shortly to this effect: I cannot endure to see you bringing oblations and incense to my altar, in that formal, hypocritical manner which attends you in every part of my service. It is highly offensive to me, to see you, who profess to be my peculiar people, spending the sacred seasons I have instituted among you in the frivolous and sinful way you commonly observe them. Instead of keeping them holy to the Lord, and entering into the spirit of the exercises proper for such solemn occasions, your conduct exhibits a scene of complicated

plicated wickedness, and base hypocrisy. You trust to the external form of the duties incumbent upon you at these times, whilst you are destitute of the devout dispositions of heart which are indispensably necessary to the right observance of these solemnities.—And is not this a great iniquity then, to impose on yourselves in the most important matters, and to deal deceitfully with God, who will not be mocked? This must be highly provoking to the infinite Majesty of heaven and earth, and expose you to his righteous displeasure: put therefore this iniquity far from you, that it may not prove your ruin.

14 Your new-moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear *them*.

The same subject is continued in this verse, which was introduced in the foregoing ones.—The new-moons are again mentioned, with the appointed feasts: by which may be intended, the feasts of the Lord, the holy convocations which were ordered to be proclaimed in their seasons, mentioned in the twenty-third chapter of Leviticus. The Lord's passover, which was commanded to be observed on the fourteenth day of the first month, at even, when the Israelites were to eat the flesh of the lambs they had slain roasted with fire, with unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. The feast of the first-fruits, observed at the time they began to reap their corns, when they were required to take the first-fruits of the earth unto the place which the Lord did choose, and to present them before him, rejoicing in every good thing which the Lord their God had given them. The feast of tabernacles, appointed to be kept on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, in which they were not to do any servile work, but to take the branches of thick trees, and make to themselves booths, in which they were to dwell seven days, and to rejoice before the Lord their God, in commemoration;

memoration of their having dwelt in booths when the Lord brought them forth from the land of Egypt. Though God had appropriated to himself these seasons, and devoted them to his service, he calls them not his, but theirs; intimating, that they made them their own, by sacrilegiously alienating from him the honour and obedience which he demanded; and that they observed them not to his glory, but in a manner suited to their own corrupt dispositions. He therefore plainly declares, that his soul hated them. The expression is strong and forcible, though not peculiar to our prophet; for God elsewhere uses much the same language, ‘I hate,’ saith he, ‘I despise your feast-days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings, and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts*.’ Though the Lord of hosts had instituted these sacred seasons for the most important purposes, yet they were so grossly perverted and abused, that, instead of being delighted with them, he held in sovereign detestation the hypocrisy and formality wherewith the services of his professing people were attended on these occasions——intimated in the following expressions:

My soul hateth, they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. The blessed God condescends to speak of himself in a way suited to our weak apprehensions; and the words which he uses must be explained in consistency with the spirituality and holiness of the divine nature. The posterity of Israel had discovered by their conduct, that they were weary of the solemnities which God had appointed them to observe, and that they reckoned the duties of his worship vexatious and troublesome. He therefore lets them know, that their abuse of his institutions rendered them a trouble to him, as well as to them, and that he could no longer bear with their grievous provocations.——Consider

* Amos v. 21, 22.

then, brethren, if you esteem the Sabbaths, the solemn seasons which the Lord our God hath appropriated to himself, holy, honourable, and a delight; and do you then refrain from finding your own pleasures, thinking your own thoughts, and speaking your own words? Do you take delight in approaching to God in the exercises of his worship, and viewing his service as your honour and happiness; do you engage in it with alacrity, and with your whole hearts? Or, Are you lukewarm and negligent in performing the service of your highest Lord, and thus render your solemn meetings offensive to the Most High, by your formal and careless behaviour? These inquiries naturally arise from this subject, and justly demand your serious attention.

15 And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

Similar testimonies of the divine displeasure are here denounced against the hypocritical people of the Jews, on account of their formal prayers, with these threatened against their oblations and feasts in the foregoing verses. They might be apt to imagine, that though God was not pleased with their external worship, he would not reject the more rational homage of their prayers and thanksgivings, whereby they professed to honour the divine Majesty. To convince them of their presumptuous mistake, they are assured, that, when performed in an unsuitable manner, they would not be regarded by the Almighty.—*And when ye spread forth your hands.* Spreading forth the hands is a gesture that, in every age of the world, hath been used by men when supplicating the throne of grace. Moses told Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that ‘as soon as he was gone out of the city, he would spread abroad his hands unto the Lord;’ by which

he meant, that he would entreat that the thunder and hail might cease *. And when king Solomon, standing before the altar of the Lord, in presence of the congregation of Israel, at the dedication of the temple, addressed God in prayer, ‘ he spread forth his hands ‘ toward heaven †.’ In reference to this practice, the expression before us is intended to signify the exercises of prayer and thanksgiving, in which it was frequently used, to denote the earnestness and importunity of the supplicants.—And lest it might have been thought, that the frequent repetition of the prayers they presented to God would render them more acceptable, they are informed, that the multitude of their prayers should not avail to this purpose. *Yea, when ye make many prayers, &c.* Whilst their bodies only were employed in the service of God, and their hearts were estranged from him, such bodily exercise, however often repeated, profited little. This important lesson our blessed Lord inculcates upon his disciples, in his most excellent sermon delivered from the Mount, ‘ But when ye pray, use not ‘ vain repetitions, as the heathen do : for they think ‘ they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be ‘ not ye therefore like unto them : for your Father ‘ knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ‘ ask him ‡.’ To dissuade them from this hypocritical practice, God here declares—*I will hide mine eyes from you—I will not hear.* These expressions, in which the faculties of men are ascribed to God, must be understood in their metaphorical sense, being designed to give us an idea of the divine procedure respecting the prayers here mentioned. Stript of the figure with which they are clothed, they plainly intimate, that Jehovah would not regard them, as he does the upright, with a pleasant countenance, nor attend to the voice of their supplications proceeding from feigned lips; but, on the contrary, that he

* Exod. ix. 29.

† 1 Kings viii. 22.

‡ Matth. vi. 7, 8.

would turn away from them as odious and sinful, and reject their petitions as unworthy of the smallest notice. He would not so attend to their prayers as to grant their requests. Their prayers were made with much coldness and indifference, and proceeded from hearts that regarded iniquity; and therefore God assures them, he would not hearken to their supplication, agreeably to what is written, ‘ He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination *.’ Both the expressions contained in this verse seem to denote nearly the same thing; namely, that the prayers of the people, here reproved, were offensive to God, who delights in the spiritual homage of renewed hearts. Though they maintained the form, they were not possessed of the spirit of prayer: they were destitute of faith in the promises respecting the great Mediator, and those intense desires after spiritual blessings, without which it is impossible to please God.

Your hands are full of blood. These words contain one important reason of the divine conduct, described in the preceding part of this verse.—To the well-grounded expectation of gracious audience to our prayers, God requires, that we lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; but, far from this, the hands of this people were full of blood. Those who were invested with power and authority condemned the innocent, and spared the guilty; whilst those who were good suffered hard things, the bad were permitted to pass unpunished. The lower classes of the people were guilty of bloody crimes and capital offences, which deserved death; such as idolatry, blasphemy, murder, and adultery: and these atrocious transgressions abounded so much among them, and were so frequently committed, as to justify the expression before us, wherein it is affirmed, their hands were full of blood. In the emphatical language of the prophet Hosea, ‘ By swearing, lying, killing, steal-

* Prov. xxviii. 9.

‘ing, and committing adultery, they broke out, and ‘blood touched blood*’. In both the historical and prophetic parts of the Old Testament, similar descriptions are given of the character of that people whom the prophet here addressed. Such then being their condition, no wonder their prayers were shut out from before God, and that he would not hear them when they called upon him.—By the instructive variety of significant expressions used by our prophet on this subject, we are taught, that frequent, pompous, and costly services, separated from true godliness, and holiness of heart and life, far from being acceptable to the Lord, are an abomination in his sight, and unprofitable to those who perform them. We have inculcated upon us this important lesson, that hypocrisy, in the service of the Living God, is most detestable to him, who delights in truth in the inward parts; and that whilst persons indulge in the practice of iniquity, they cannot expect he will regard their prayers, or other acts of worship. Let us, my friends, be hereby excited to diligent attention to our spirits, especially when employed in the service of the Searcher of hearts. Whilst many rest satisfied with the form of godliness, the profession of Christianity, and the performance of the external part of duty, let it be our constant study to serve the Lord in sincerity and truth, under a deep conviction, that he knoweth our hearts, and ponders our paths.

16 ¶ Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil.

After the warm expostulations contained in the preceding verses, we might justly have expected to hear awful denunciations of terrible judgments against those who were addicted to such sinful practices. In-

* Hosea iv. 2.

stead of these, we are agreeably surpris'd with the most friendly and salutary advices, necessary to be carefully attended to, and faithfully observed, in order to deliverance from deserved calamities.—*Wash ye.* The people, to whom these words were primarily directed, were not only polluted through the corruption of their nature in common with others, in consequence of descending from those who had revolted from God, but they had defiled themselves by their multiplied transgressions, and the unholy performance of the duties of divine worship. Sin is represented in scripture under many instructive similitudes, serving to shew its vile abominable nature, its odiousness in his sight, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and the impurity of such as indulge in it. We thereby contract that filthiness of the flesh and spirit, that universal pollution with which our souls and bodies are tainted, and from which our outward and inward man, our hearts and our hands, need to be cleansed. All the washings and purifications under the law plainly supposed this defilement: they represented to men the indispensable necessity of their being cleansed from sin, and were emblematical of what is here recommended. Though this, and the following expression, may be viewed as explaining and enforcing each other, it may not be improper to consider the first, as relating to pardon of sin, from the guilt of which we are delivered by the precious blood of Christ, and the latter, as respecting the pollution of sin, from which we are freed by the spirit of Jesus. Both these are equally necessary to the salvation of men, and inseparably joined together in the promises and commands of God. From the express declarations contained in scripture, it appears, that the guilt of sin is removed by the blood of the Son of God, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, by faith in which we are freely justified. This blood, and the absolute necessity of its application, were typified, under the Old

Testament,

Testament, to the people whom our prophet now addressed. When therefore he directs them to wash, he requires the diligent use of the means and institutions which God had appointed, that thereby they might obtain the remission of sins, and be saved from the punishment of their transgressions; and cautions them to beware of those sins which would add to the guilt already contracted.

Make you clean. God, in infinite mercy, hath promised, ‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you*.’ This intimates his gracious intentions, his perfect ability, to purify the most polluted sinners, and that this extraordinary work is peculiar to him, who only can bring a clean out of an unclean thing. Notwithstanding, in perfect consistence with such promises, God saith, by Isaiah, *Make you clean*; intimating, that it is our indispensable duty, to concur with him in carrying on this great work, by the diligent improvement of the means he hath appointed for acquiring the purity he hath promised, which is essential to our true happiness, and carefully to avoid every thing that might increase our impurity. To wash and purify his people is the glorious prerogative of the blessed God, and is effectuated by his word and Spirit; and therefore we observe the supplicants before his throne, under deep impression of this humbling truth, adopting such requests as this, ‘Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin †.’—As the purification, here spoken of, is equally incumbent upon you, brethren, as upon the Jews of old, permit me to exhort you, in the words of God, ‘Wash ye, make ye clean. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, purify your hearts, ye double-minded ‡.’ To this necessary work I call you, in order to convince you of your pollution, and your utter inability to wash

* Ezek. xxxvi. 25.

† Psal. li. 2.

‡ James iv. 8.

away your spiritual defilement, to inculcate upon you the indispensable necessity of being thoroughly cleansed from your iniquities, and to excite you to the diligent use of all the means instituted for this purpose. Had I been illustrating these directions whilst Judaism was in force, I would have advised to the ceremonial washings appointed under the law, which sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, and typified good things which were then future. But now these carnal ordinances being abolished under the gospel, I call you to 'the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;' and you are now invited to repair to it immediately, in the exercise of faith, humility, and desire, that you may be washed from your sins, and cleansed from your pollutions, that your consciences being purified from dead works, you may serve the Living God.

Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. The actions referred to, in this advice, seem to be those mentioned in the preceding verses. The multitude of sacrifices which the men of Judah presented before the Lord, the solemn appearances they made in his divine presence, the observance of their sacred assemblies and appointed feasts, together with their many prayers, were no doubt the doings here intended. Much sin, particularly of hypocrisy and formality, attended the performance of these duties; respecting which, God, by the prophet, had expostulated with them, in the foregoing verses; and this it is which they are directed to put away. They did not observe divine institutions out of love to God and his authority, they did not delight in drawing nigh to him with their whole hearts, nor were they animated by a lively faith in the great objects prefigured by the different parts of their worship. All the evil that attended their doings was perfectly known to him, who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men, and before whom all things are naked and open. Not a sinful thought, not the least dissimulation,

mulation, not a wrong intention or corrupt principle, sprung up in their hearts, but it came fully under his inspection, and proved highly offensive to him, who cannot look on sin but with detestation. That their doings might become acceptable to him, they are directed to put away the evil that adhered to their services, and heartily to renounce all those vicious principles, and wrong views, whereby they had been influenced in the worship of the true God. For this purpose, it was necessary that their hearts should be purified by faith, their mistaken views corrected, their temper rectified, and their practices reformed.—This exhortation is no less necessary to us, than to those to whom it was primarily given. Ye may be sensible, that much sin cleaves to all our services, which ought not only to be acknowledged with sorrow, but renounced as hurtful and dangerous. ‘If then iniquity be in your hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot, yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear.’*

Cease to do evil. Similar, short, comprehensive directions are often repeated, both in the Old and New Testament. We are exhorted, ‘to depart from evil, and do good †;’ we are required, ‘to abhor that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good ‡.’ Though evil sometimes denotes, in scripture, all manner of sin and wickedness, it is to be understood at other times in a more restricted sense, for the wrongs and injuries done by one person to another. In this sense, our divine Master requires us not to resist evil ||. This last seems evidently to be the import of the word in the expression before us, where the professing people of God are supposed to have been addicted to the practice of evil, and are dissuaded from persisting in those evils they committed against

* Job. xi. 14, 15.
|| Matth. v. 39.

† Psal. xxxiv. 14.

‡ Rom. xii. 9.

their brethren. "Human happiness," as an eminent writer observes, "is a tender plant, which every "rude breath is sufficient to blast." The precept before us is intended to set a fence about it, to preserve it from injuries, to prevent the shocking spectacle of human misery, and to inculcate the necessity of relieving it. Remedies, though always to be used when necessary, are often troublesome and painful when applied, and uncertain with respect to the effects they may produce. True wisdom, therefore, directs to use every precaution that may render them needless; and this seems to be the import of the duty here required. In positive precepts there is sometimes room for the plea of ignorance or doubt; but no good excuse can be given for the neglect of what is contained in this short direction. When men are exhorted to acts of beneficence, they may plead inconvenience or inability; but certainly no one can justly plead exemption from refraining to do wrong; so that obedience to this rule is confessedly incumbent upon all.—This circumstance ought to remind you, who now hear me, of your intimate concern in this direction, which it is your indispensable duty to obey. Think not to excuse yourselves, in the words of the prophet, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil*.' The important change which, of yourselves, you are unable to effectuate, the Spirit of God, which you are encouraged to ask, can easily accomplish; and what God hath declared to be your duty, we are bound to inculcate, and you to obey, not the less because you have foolishly indulged in an opposite conduct, and thereby hurt your capacity of doing good. Cease then from injuring your neighbours by fraud and oppression, beware of hurting and distressing them, of disrespecting your superiors, of contemning your in-

* Jer. xiii. 23.

feriors, or behaving with rudeness toward your equals. ‘With-hold not good from him to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it*.’

17 Learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

More salutary advices are given in this verse by the wonderful Counsellor.—Learn to do well, or to do good, as the Hebrew word also signifies. Here it may denote, the practice of that which is honest, virtuous, and just, in opposition to the evil cautioned against in the preceding verse. This seems to be its obvious meaning in the forecited psalm †. Doing well comprehends the practice of every good work, included in our duty to God, in the exercises of goodness, righteousness, and truth toward others, and in temperance and sobriety respecting ourselves. That these things be well done, or, in other words, that men do good, their actions must proceed from good principles, the renewed dispositions of a good and honest heart. Education and custom may habituate men to the form of godliness, and good nature may prompt them to a kind behaviour toward others, by which they may acquire much esteem from those who are unacquainted with the principles from whence their actions proceeded. Whereas were they known, and properly examined, they would be found extremely defective, and far from deserving to be called good.—Their conduct must be directed to worthy and valuable purposes. A love of decency, a regard to reputation, a desire of promoting worldly interests, may be substituted in room of love to God, reverence for his authority, the love of righteousness, and gratitude for divine goodness. These dispositions may induce

* Prov. iii. 27.

† Psal. xxxiv. 14.

men to do some things good in themselves, though their actions remain destitute of those moral qualities of which they have only the appearance. But in well-doing, the great ends to be kept invariably in view, are, advancing the glory of God, the promoting of our own salvation and that of others, the acquiring a growing resemblance to our great Lord, the obtaining the divine approbation, and being prepared for the enjoyment of eternal glory. These distinguish the substance from the shadow, the sterling coin from that which is counterfeited.—Nor is this all, in order to doing well, our actions must be regulated by the standard of the word of God. The caprice or laws of men, prevalent example, and fond inclination, are the rules observed in evil-doing, and chiefly attended to by those who wish to appear before men to do good, and who maintain a kind of superstitious regard for the external parts of godliness. But in doing well, the only rule and measure of all our actions, is the perfect law of liberty, which clearly points out what is necessary to be done, in what manner it ought to be executed, and represents the principles, the motives, and ends, agreeably to which every thing truly good must be performed.

This divine art God invites his ancient people to learn. This intimates, that, though they were wise to do evil, yet they were mere children and novices in the practice of that which is good; and, having never been exercised in well-doing, they needed to be taught the first principles, and instructed in the very rudiments of this noble science. They are directed immediately to set about this important work, and carefully to improve every mean that might conduce to promote their acquaintance with what is truly good, and give them a facility in well-doing. It was necessary for this purpose they should receive the instructions of divine wisdom, and experience what it is to be taught of him who teacheth to profit, who gives understanding to the simple, to the young man

man knowledge and discretion. It was needful, that, in humble dependence on his blessing, they should diligently attend to the instructions of those he employed as subordinate teachers, not out of necessity on his part, but to accommodate himself to the weakness of their capacities who were to be taught. Whilst under his tuition, their proficiency in learning should be estimated, not by their progress in speculative knowledge, but in holy obedience, in obeying from the heart the form of doctrine delivered unto them.—This exercise, my brethren, is as necessary for you as for the Jews in the days of Isaiah; and, therefore, I entreat you will employ yourselves in learning the important lesson of well-doing. For this end, plead with God that he may become your teacher, and submit to all his instructions, otherwise your natural ignorance will never be removed, your perverse wills can never be subdued, nor your corrupt prejudices taken away. The teaching of men, after all they have said, can never purify and reform the heart; and therefore labour to get well acquainted with the divine precepts, and to experience their power enlightening your minds, impressing your hearts, and leading you on to well-doing. And having learned this divine art, endeavour, by patient continuance in the practice of it, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

Seek judgment. In this, and the following expressions, contained in this verse, the prophet directs to the practice of several branches of well-doing. Judgment is used in various senses in scripture, which I shall not stay at present to mention. It seems to denote here, acting agreeably to the rules given in the perfect law of equity, in which the Lord our God hath shewn what is just and good, and what he requires of us. It consists in that proper and equitable conduct which stands in opposition to rigour, fraud, and cruelty; which is regulated by a strict regard to integrity and righteousness, and tempers every demand

mand made upon others with mercy and moderation. It is to think upon and practise whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praise-worthy. It is to act according to the golden rule of our blessed Saviour, 'Doing to men whatsoever we would that they should do to us.' This is indeed an object highly worthy of being sought after. The expression naturally supposes, that judgment had been in a great measure lost, as was the case among the Jews at the time this salutary advice was given them. It imports, that they ought to have entertained a high esteem of the exercises of justice; for no person will earnestly seek after what he reckons is trifling and insignificant. It also includes, diligent endeavours to acquire that judgment in the way which God hath marked out, and a vigorous pursuit after this truly desirable object, which should be sought for as silver, and searched for as hid treasures.—This is what I would have you to apply your hearts to, that thereby you may be assimilated into a blessed resemblance to God, who delights in exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and tender mercy in the earth. This will render you amiable in the eyes of those who are good: it will render you ornaments to society, and useful in the world: it will make way for most agreeable communion with the God of judgment: it will afford you happy experience of true consolation; and prove well-pleasing in his sight, who loveth them that follow after righteousness.

Relieve the oppressed. Oppression is the dismal effect of employing power and influence to cruel and unjust purposes. The poor and the needy, the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger, are commonly the persons most exposed to this iron-rod; whilst the great, the rich, and the powerful, through their pride and vanity, are commonly the instruments of inflicting it. It is indeed a fore evil, that those whom divine providence

vidence hath exalted to the most eminent station, to whom God hath given riches, honour, and power, that they may protect and do good to those that are destitute, should notwithstanding harass, vex, and injure them. This is ‘as if the rod should shake itself against him that lifts it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself as if it were not wood*.’ This is a most odious iniquity in the sight of the Lord God merciful and gracious, and a strange perversion of the purposes of his kind providence. This is a grievous burden to those who are obliged to sustain it, and attended with the worst of consequences, as Solomon observed; ‘Oppression maketh a wise man mad†.’ It is the highest injustice, and the grossest impiety, an atrocious sin which exposes its abettors to the awful judgments of Almighty God.—Such as are oppressed the people of God are directed to relieve. This imports, that they ought to employ their power and influence to rescue the injured from under the calamities they feel—that they labour to administer reasonable support to them under the hard treatment they sustain—and that they exert themselves, by every lawful expedient, to prevent their oppressors from farther distressing them.—You cannot excuse yourselves from taking part in this pleasant employment, when you consider, with the wisest of men, the oppressions done under the sun. If you attend to your intimate connection with those who suffer wrong, and how deeply the blessed God hath interested himself in their behalf—when you behold their tears of sorrow, surely you cannot refuse to lend them any small relief that is in your power to afford.

Judge the fatherless. Strictly speaking, the fatherless are those who have been bereaved of their parents, whom God hath constituted the guardians and guides of their children. In scripture the character is not confined to such, but frequently includes those

* Isaiah x. 15.

† Ecclesi. vii. 7.

who are in forlorn circumstances, destitute of friends to assist and relieve them. In this extensive sense God is said to be the helper of the fatherless *. The character here comprehends, not only those who have been deprived of their parents, but such also as are in a helpless state, needful of the divine interposition in their favour. Orphans often fall a prey to the injustice and cruelty of bad men, notwithstanding the oppression and robbery of the fatherless are accounted by Jehovah the most aggravated crimes, which he hath threatened to punish by the most awful judgments †. On persons of this description, he hath set many marks of his friendly attention and regard. He hath implanted in mankind a solicitous concern for the welfare of their own children, which is easily transferred to the young ones of others. He hath enforced this natural propensity, by inculcating the care of orphans as their duty, by promises of mercy to the obedient, and declarations of his awful displeasure against the rebellious: and, in the course of his adorable providence, he makes necessary provision for them, and disposes many to pity and befriend them. In the words before us, he calls upon his professing people, and their rulers, to judge the fatherless. Viewing the words as directed to those in power, they import, that they ought to endeavour rightly to understand, and impartially to determine, the causes of the orphans which were brought before them for decision. Considering them as directed to the people at large, it is necessary to interpret the judging here recommended, as signifying the pleading their cause, in which sense the word is sometimes used ‡. The precept requires them, to appear in behalf of the fatherless and helpless, and to maintain their cause against those who would hurt and injure them.—Remember this too is your indispensable duty, would you resemble him, who declares,

* Psal. x. 14.

† Isaiah x. 2.

‡ Jer. v. 28.

from his holy habitation, that he is the Father of the fatherless; would you obey and please him, from whom you have received all your comforts, who hath often pitied and helped you, when no other hand could have administered relief. Let not any opportunity slip, of shewing kindness to the orphan and the destitute; but do what lies in your power to support their rights, and relieve their necessities.

Plead for the widow. The word translated *widow* is very emphatical, being derived from one that signifies to *bind*, or be *silent*. Widows are exposed to many troubles, and frequently detained in the bonds of affliction and sorrow, from which they cannot extricate themselves. They are often silent, through grief of heart, incapable of speaking in their own behalf, and defending their own cause. In this helpless condition, they are apt to become a prey to the unjust and oppressive among men, who endeavour to distress them in various ways. For their encouragement, the Lord of the whole earth hath declared, That he is their Husband, who espouses their cause, and who will certainly be avenged on those who afflict them. Indeed there is no class of the human species to whom he shews more attention and compassion, than to those who are widows indeed, trusting in him. In proof of this, we observe he frequently recommends them to the care of his ancient people, and repeatedly requires them to afford them every necessary relief; and, in the words under consideration, he directs them to plead for the widow; or, as the word denotes, to manage the cause of the widow.—Interest yourselves deeply in their behalf, give them your friendly assistance in conducting their affairs, and, as occasion requires, neglect not to take part against those who would vex and oppress them. This is highly necessary, to demonstrate your subjection to God, and to discover a becoming solicitude for the happiness of the most feeble of our race, and oftentimes the most neglected. The careless omission of
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this duty, by the people to whom our prophet was sent with this message, exposed them to the most severe divine judgments.—Let us then take warning, and shew ourselves willing and obedient to the voice of God, as we value his life-giving favour, and would escape his righteous vengeance. By the faithful performance of the important duties here recommended, let us demonstrate to ourselves and others, that we have put away the evil of our doings, and learned to do well.

18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

In these words the eternal God vouchsafes to invite his people to fix their attention on the aggravations wherewith their sins were attended, and the astonishing manner in which he confers forgiveness.—The address stands in the form of an affectionate entreaty, proceeding from the utmost tenderness, and concern for the happiness of those to whom it is directed. Come now, however heinous and multiplied your transgressions, and listen with attention and candour to the following interesting truths designed for your encouragement. The reasoning to which you are invited, denotes such an argument or debate as arises between two parties, one of whom brings a heavy charge against the other, who defends himself, and answers all the objections proposed. By forsaking the Lord, and provoking the Holy One of Israel, the men of Judah practically affirmed, his service was neither honourable nor profitable: by dissimulation and hypocrisy, they dealt deceitfully with God, and contracted the most complicated guilt, from which they might have no hopes of being delivered. Such is the unbiassed equity, and infinite clemency of the supreme Lord of all, that he conde-

scends to vindicate the rectitude of his dispensations, and declines not fully to answer all the objections brought against the administration of the riches of his mercy. This we see exemplified in many passages of scripture, beside the striking instance now before us. In the sixth chapter of Micah, from the 2d verse, God, having summoned the mountains, and strong foundations of the earth to attend, pathetically expostulates with his people as to their sins; he reminds them of his mercies, and sets forth his controversy with them; to which he demands their answer. Having reached conviction to their hearts of their ingratitude and rebellion, they anxiously inquire, what course they should take to escape his wrath, and obtain acceptance with him? In the reasoning contained in this verse, from which I am now speaking, the Lord proposes the most powerful arguments to induce his people to comply with the preceding directions, to wash, and make clean, and put away the evil of their doings, whilst he gives the most convincing demonstration of the riches of his grace. An earthly prince would hardly deign to reason with his rebellious subjects concerning the wickedness of their revolt, and the way in which they may hope to be pardoned; yet the Lord of hosts calls those whose hands were full of blood, and whose services were an abomination, to hearken to his reviving declarations.— Whilst we contemplate with wonder the infinite compassion of Jehovah, in thus familiarly addressing us, let us diligently attend to the instructive reasoning subjoined in the following words :

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Both these expressions seem to be of the same import, the one serving to illustrate and confirm the other, and therefore I shall consider them together. Sin is the transgression of the law; or, as it is well defined in our Shorter Catechism, it consists in any want of conformity unto, or transgression against the law

law of God. Some sins are less heinous, and others more aggravated and atrocious, on which account they are compared to scarlet and crimson, the strongest of all colours. In the expressions now under consideration, there is an obvious reference to the concluding part of the 15th verse, where those here spoken to are said to have had hands full of blood, which is of a scarlet and crimson colour. They had provoked the Lord their God by the most bloody crimes and daring transgressions, whereby they were deeply involved in that complicated guilt, which fully justifies the similitude here used. Their sins were attended with every circumstance that could increase their aggravations: they were committed against much instruction which they had received, against manifold mercies wherewith they had been favoured, against repeated warnings that had been given them, after the most solemn engagements to the service of God, many professions of repentance, and most awful judgments threatened, and in part executed upon them. With great propriety are the sins referred to likened to scarlet and crimson, which, so far as I know, are colours impossible for human art to discharge.—Notwithstanding, God, with whom all things are possible, declares, they shall be white as snow and wool, the purity of which are so well known as to require no illustration. Both comparisons represent the remarkable cleanness, and high degree of purity, which God promises to communicate to those who have been guilty of the greatest transgressions. This was verified in David, when God, in answer to his prayer, ‘purged him with hyssop, so that he was clean, and washed him, so that he was whiter than snow*’; and in ‘those who came out of great tribulation, that have their robes washed, and made white in the blood of the Lamb†.’ In these expressions we observe a figure of speech which frequently

* Psa. li. 7.

† Rev. vii. 14.

occurs in scripture; wherein that is ascribed to things which properly belongs to the persons possessed of these things. You may see an example of this in Matth. viii. 3. where we read, 'Jesus put forth his hand, and touched the leper, saying, I will, be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed;' *i. e.* he was cleansed from the leprosy wherewith he had been afflicted. In this sense we must understand the words before us, where sins like scarlet and crimson are said to be made white as snow. It being impossible, in the nature of things, that sin can change its nature, what is here said must be descriptive of that happy alteration made in the condition of sinners, when they are washed from their sins in the blood of Christ, and their hearts and hands are purified through his word and Spirit. However deeply they were tinged with the pollution of iniquity, and stained with guilt, they are cleansed from their filthiness, and saved from their unrighteousness.

It is vain to object to this reasoning of infinite wisdom, that you have sinned with a high hand, and much stubbornness; that your sins have been frequently repeated, and long persisted in. These very circumstances contribute to give them the scarlet colour and crimson die here mentioned; and though they have been multiplied without number, and aggravated beyond description, you cannot conclude they exceed the reach of that mercy which multiplies to pardon, and extends from everlasting to everlasting. Nor does it affect the argument we have been considering, that the truth it contains may be grossly perverted to the worst of purposes. What is there good and valuable that hath not been abused? The best blessings, life and health, medicine, liberty, pardon, have been grossly perverted; but no wise man, on that account, will undervalue or neglect them; no more must we omit, for that reason, to unfold the riches of divine mercy. This is a strong drink, which must be plentifully administered for the consolation of

of them that are ready to perish, though presumption and impenitence may prompt men to abuse it to bad purposes. Diligence in business is converted by the covetous into an encouragement to eat the bread of carefulness; must we cease therefore to exhort men, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. Take no thought for to-morrow sounds like music in the ears of the sluggard, folding his hands to sleep; but must we, for this reason, refrain from persuading you to be careful for nothing, but, in every thing, by prayer and supplication, to let your requests be made known unto God. Though the riches of the grace of God hath been wickedly perverted into an encouragement to sin, by those whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil, their exhibition hath never failed to prove a powerful antidote against sin, to such as have tasted that the Lord is gracious; and, therefore, I decline not to treat of this reviving subject.—Admire then the riches of forgiving mercy, and beware lest you turn it into wantonness: it is dispensed that you may resemble the snow and the wool in purity; and this will be its certain effect, if you have experienced its happy influence.

19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.

This verse describes the happy consequences of a prompt obedience to the directions contained in the preceding verses. The posterity of Israel, like other people, were stiff-necked and rebellious, uncircumcised in heart and ears, and would not hearken to the voice of God, nor obey his commands. They were wise to do evil, but how to do that which is good they knew not. In order to their being willing and obedient, God must have wrought in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure, and made them his willing people in a day of his power, overcoming

coming that perverse obstinacy for which they were remarkable, and disposing them cheerfully to comply with the salutary advices which were given them. If, in consequence of this happy change of disposition, they were willing to wash and be clean, to put away the evil of their doings, to cease to do evil, and learn to do well; if they were willing to abandon their wicked ways, to have recourse to the sovereign mercy of God for pardon of sin, to renounce their perverse obstinacy, and to be governed as his loyal subjects by his righteous laws; then it should be well with them, and their children, and all the promises made to obedience should be their portion.—These, Christians, are essential ingredients in the character of all the people of God; and you will do well seriously to consider, if they are descriptive of your temper and practice. Are you heartily willing to accept of the generous offers made you, in the word of God, of the most valuable blessings, from a deep conviction of their transcendent excellence, and suitableness to your condition? Are you obedient to your rightful Lord, viewing his service as your indispensable duty, your truest wisdom, and highest interest; and do you study, in dependence on divine aid, to yield him that cheerful, unlimited obedience he graciously demands, and which is most justly his due? That you answer these simple, interesting inquiries in the affirmative, is indispensably necessary to your enjoying the blessings contained in the following words:

Ye shall eat the good of the land. The land primarily intended in these words was the land of Canaan, the glory of all lands, which flowed with milk and honey, and abounded with corn and cattle, wine and oil, and the precious things of the earth, put forth by the sun and moon. This land the Almighty God promised for a possession to the progenitors of this people, as an instance of his peculiar regard, and a type of a heavenly and better country, which he would bestow on the spiritual posterity of the father of the faithful.

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The good of that land comprehended all the good things which the children of Israel therein enjoyed, abundance of all the comforts of this life, multitudes of flocks, large increase in things necessary to temporal prosperity, deliverance from diseases, and the other evils incident to the nations around them, and the peaceable possession of the sacred institutions of divine worship wherewith they were favoured.— To eat this good, is to enjoy it, to feast upon it, so as to be thereby agreeably supported and satisfied. It is not to possess the riches of the land as some do, who cannot enjoy them, and find little satisfaction from them; or as others, who have but small and few possessions, and therefore cannot be said to have the riches of the land. The expression imports, that they should have large and valuable possessions, which they should liberally use; that, under the care of divine providence, opportunity should be afforded them of living on the fruits of the land, from which they should reap the most pleasing satisfaction. These good things were intended to represent heavenly and better things, to which they were directed to look forward as their certain portion, did the character of willing and obedient belong to them in the proper sense of the words. Then should they be exalted to inherit the land of uprightness, and be satisfied abundantly with the fatness of God's house, and the rivers of his pleasures, which are before his face, and at his right hand for evermore.—Men and brethren, what a powerful motive does this consideration suggest, to enforce your compliance with the counsel of God, and your obedience to his righteous authority! If you cordially comply with the advices of the wonderful Counsellor, you shall eat the good of the land, you shall receive every temporal comfort which infinite wisdom sees proper for you; with these you shall have his blessing, that maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it, whilst they shall prove earnest and pledges of eternal blessings. You shall enjoy the benefit of divine institutions

tions and dispensations, both prosperous and afflictive; and with these you shall be favoured with renewed communications of pardon and life, of righteousness and grace. Death itself shall operate for your advantage, by introducing you into that land in which you shall dwell for ever, and enjoy those things which eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither heart conceived. May you be so happy as feel the force of this argument, which is admirably calculated to excite you to obedience to God.

20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

The extreme danger of rejecting the counsel of God is here represented.—To refuse, in the sense here meant, is to reject with contempt what we will not grant to accept of, or submit to. The things supposed, in this verse, to be thus refused, are, the wholesome admonitions contained in the 16th and following verses, which ought to have been gratefully received, and faithfully obeyed by God's ancient people, being most suitable to their circumstances, and conducive to their most important interests. To reject these must have been highly offensive to that God, who condescended, after their manifold provocations, to point out the way of safety; and most injurious to themselves, who, by this conduct, became exposed to more awful judgments. By acting in this manner, they rebelled against God, and declared they would not subject themselves to the authority of their rightful Sovereign, and best Friend. Their refusal is here justly interpreted as rebellion, which consists in subjects withholding obedience to the laws enacted for their benefit, and taking up arms to overturn the kingdom or state. Thus the professing people of the Most High, rejecting his laws, and walking after the imagination of their own hearts, were guilty
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of rebellion against their highest Lord.—What obstinate wickedness is contained in this character! Is it not just and reasonable that they should have yielded subjection and obedience to him who created them; who continually preserved them; who redeemed them from the most deplorable bondage, and required them to do nothing but what is holy, just, and good, and tending to advance their truest interests; who promises the most valuable blessings to the willing and obedient, and threatens the most dreadful judgments against the rebellious. If it betrays the most sullen contempt in a child, to refuse to obey the lawful commands of his father; if it discovers the most perverse disposition in a people, to reject the mild and equitable authority of their prince; what language can express the guilt contracted by refusing to obey the wholesome admonitions of the Lord our God?—Beware then of refusing to hearken to him who now speaks to you from heaven; ‘For if they escaped not, who refused him
 ‘that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape,
 ‘if we turn away from him that speaketh from
 ‘heaven*.

Ye shall be devoured with the sword. The sword, you all know, is a sharp weapon used in war, whereby the blood of multitudes hath been shed to the ground; and therefore when war is threatened in scripture, it is sometimes called the sword. At other times it denotes, all those calamities wherewith the nations are visited on account of their sins, whereby mankind are afflicted and destroyed. In this extensive sense the word seems to be used by Job, where he thus speaks: ‘Be ye afraid of the sword, for wrath bringeth the
 ‘punishment of the sword †;’ *i. e.* all manner of judgments. In the words before us it may be understood in either sense, as denoting the desolations of war, or all those calamities whereby God punishes men in this world for their sins. The Hebrew word,

* Heb. xii. 25.

† Job. xix. 29.

which signifies a sword, is derived from one signifying to dry up, to lay waste, or destroy; and with great propriety, as that weapon is employed in consuming and spreading desolation among mankind: hence it is said to eat flesh, to be filled with blood, to reach to the soul, and to devour from one end of the land to another, so that no flesh hath peace*. Here it is foretold concerning those who refuse and rebel, Ye shall be devoured by the sword. In scripture we read of the hand, the face, and the mouth of the sword. The first of these expressions may be of the same import with the phrase often used among us, The sword in hand, drawn out of the scabbard, and ready to strike, denoting present imminent danger. The second seems to signify its visible approach, and rapid progress toward the destruction of mankind. To the last there seems to be a manifest reference in the words before us; which plainly intimates, that the sword, in a figurative sense, hath a mouth, whereby it devours the human race, and consumes the fruits of the earth by which men are supported.—This is the awful judgment here threatened as the just punishment of disobedience to God, and affords a striking contrast to what was said in the preceding verse. There it was declared, If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; here it is foretold, That if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be food for the sword. This procedure clearly shews, that the ways of God toward the righteous and wicked are perfectly just and right, and that he recompenses men according to their works.—Beware then of being contentious, and disobedient to the truth, lest you bring on others, as well as yourselves, swift destruction in this world, tribulation and wrath, indignation and anguish, in that which is to come.

For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The men of Judah might be apt to consider what Isaiah had de-

* Jer. xii. 12.

livered as the word of a feeble man like themselves, who could do but little, whatever he promised or threatened; and they might rashly conclude, that little regard was to be paid either to him or his prophecy. Far from believing the word of the Lord which he spake, they used this haughty language, ‘ Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it *.’ They vainly imagined, that either his words would not come to pass, or that the fulfilment of them would be delayed for a considerable space of time. But in this they foolishly deceived themselves; and found, in their sad experience, that when they looked for peace no good came; for a time of health, behold trouble. To prevent them from indulging delusive hopes of safety, assurance is here given, that the above are the declarations of eternal truth, the faithful sayings of God, who is truth, and for whom it is impossible to lie. He who gave existence to creation, who is all-sufficient, and unchangeably faithful, will most certainly accomplish all his promises and threatenings. ‘ The word that goeth out of his mouth shall not return to him void; but it shall execute that which he pleases, and shall prosper in the thing whereunto he hath sent it †. Heaven and earth may pass away, but one title of what he hath spoken shall not fail of receiving its full completion.’ The declaration before us is evidently intended to give firmness and certainty to all the foregoing predictions, that they may produce their proper effect upon all to whom they belong. How just and awful the threatenings here denounced! How gracious and comfortable, beyond expression, the assurances given! Let us then learn wisdom from Judah’s folly; and, being assured that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken what is contained in this prophecy, let us reverence, believe, and obey him, so shall we be established.

* Isaiah v. 19.

† Isaiah lv. 11.

21 ¶ How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment, righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

In the form of complaint, the prophet here exclaims concerning the lamentable change which had happened in the condition of those to whom he was sent, and bewails their corrupt, degenerate state.—By the faithful city, Jerusalem was doubtless primarily intended, the city which God had chosen, described as the joy of the whole earth, the perfection of beauty, the city of the Lord of hosts, the holy city, in which he put his name, and which he honoured with the symbols of his divine presence.—Here it is called the faithful city, a character it once justly deserved, whilst its inhabitants faithfully adhered to Jehovah as their God, acknowledging no other God beside him, performing with fidelity the sacred homage and obedience he required, and diligently fulfilling the solemn engagements they lay under to his service. This was the honourable character of Jerusalem in the days of David and Solomon, and some other good kings, under whose government the men of Judah discovered a firm attachment to the worship of the true God, and the obedience of his precepts. In such seasons they shewed much fidelity toward God, and the concerns of his glory: they were more than ordinarily faithful in promoting the interests of the nation, and in performing their engagements to one another; and thus they arrived at the character of the faithful city. Then, in the words of the prophet Hosea, ‘Judah ruled with God, and was faithful with the most holy *.’—*It was full of judgment.* Most equitable and just decisions were given by those who were vested with power and authority, when seated upon the thrones of judgment, and every species of fraud and injustice was detected and punished. The practice of

* Hosea xi. 12.

justice and equity was followed by all ranks of people, who, in general, discovered a becoming regard to whatsoever things are just and honest. Of this judgment it is said, the faithful city was full: it was easily and plentifully distributed among all ranks by those in power, and universally respected in the conduct of men in every condition of life, from the highest to the lowest.—*Righteousness lodged in it.* By righteousness, as distinguished from judgment, mentioned in the preceding words, may be meant integrity and uprightness of disposition and conduct. In this sense Job seems to understand it, where he says, ‘Till I die, I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live*.’ According to this interpretation the expression will denote, that the men of Jerusalem were sincere and honest in their transactions with one another, in which they discovered a love for that which is right, and a becoming detestation against every species of injustice. This righteousness is said to have lodged there. The word signifies *to reside*, or *take up a night’s lodging*. This desirable guest, whose presence exalteth a nation, dwelt in the faithful city as in its proper habitation, where it was highly respected, and kindly entertained.—This fidelity, judgment, and righteousness, raised Jerusalem to a state of the most eminent prosperity and glory, which was happily enjoyed by its inhabitants during their continuance in these laudable practices. This consideration ought to render us emulous, in our humble sphere, to imitate, in things truly praise-worthy, that city, which was once the admiration of the world, and a figure of the Jerusalem which cometh down from above, and is the mother of us all. But, alas!

The faithful city is become an harlot, &c. How affecting the contrast! How great the degeneracy, here

* Job xxvii. 5, 6.

stated in the form of a question, to render it the more striking, and to excite the greater regret on account of the change described! Instead of fidelity to God, and the exercises of justice and righteousness toward man, the inhabitants of Judea, particularly of Jerusalem, had wickedly alienated themselves from the Most High, and attached themselves to other gods, and their service. They had forsaken the Living God, renounced subjection to his authority, broken his covenant, and joined themselves to the idols of the nations, whom they shamefully preferred to the God of Israel. Thus did they endeavour to reproach him and his ordinances, and testified their infidelity in the service of that God who had conferred upon them the most important privileges.—*But now murderers.* This is added, as farther descriptive of that dismal change of manners which had taken place at Jerusalem. Of all characters the one here mentioned is the most wicked and odious. The corrupt principles of malice and envy, hatred and covetousness, from which murder proceeds, actuated the inhabitants of that city, and prompted them to commit the most enormous crimes. At such a pitch of wickedness had they arrived, that they offered violence to their brethren, poured contempt on the divine authority, deprived those whom they ought to have loved as themselves of their most valuable treasure; they defiled the land, and ranked themselves among the enemies of society, whilst they forfeited their own lives, and ruined their own souls. There were no doubt among them some hidden ones, who kept themselves from the idolatrous and murderous practices which prevailed, and mourned, in secret places, for the abominations done in the midst of them: but these were comparatively few, and could not stem the torrent of impiety and wickedness, which threatened with destruction the whole nation.—We are hereby instructed in this interesting truth, that the most glorious and renowned church of God on earth may become so corrupt in principles
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and practice as to be the reverse of what they once were. May this alarming consideration produce its proper effect upon us, by engaging us to beware of the first appearances of apostacy from God, to remember whence we have fallen, to repent, and do our first works, lest our candlestick be removed out of its place.

22 Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water.

In these words the remarkable change in the Jewish nation, and particularly in the city of Jerusalem, from its former purity and integrity, to its present degenerate state, is expressed by simple, but instructive metaphors. They plainly intimate, in their literal sense, that, by wicked, fraudulent practices which had become prevalent, their money was greatly adulterated, and their wine corrupted: their most valuable articles of commerce were much spoiled. But it appears from the verse immediately following, where the subject here introduced is continued, and the corruption of their princes is particularly mentioned, that the words are to be considered chiefly in their figurative sense. In this view, by the silver and the wine we may understand, the princes, the judges, the priests, and the instructors of the people, with the righteous judgments they executed, and the pure doctrines which they taught. These are the riches, the ornaments, and the most valuable parts of the community, who beautify and adorn it by the purity and integrity of their lives, and enrich it by the justice of their decisions, and the excellency of their doctrines. Like the best wine, they enliven the spirits, and rejoice the hearts of those who feel their benign influence.—Now, such was the corrupt state of the men of Judah and Jerusalem, that *their silver was become dross, and their wine mixed with water*. Dross is that heterogeneous matter which is mixed
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with metals, and is separated from them by means of the fire, in which they are purified, to increase their value and usefulness. It has a very deceitful appearance; and seems exceedingly like the metal with which it is incorporated. In this respect it afforded a striking image of the Jewish nation, who, though they professed to be the people of God, ‘every one was a hypocrite, and an evil-doer, and every mouth spake folly *.’ Dross, in some measure; obscures the lustre of the metal with which it is mixed, and so hinders its beauty from being seen. In like manner, the wicked and hypocritical of the house of Judah, blending themselves with the righteous and faithful of the nation, sullied their beauty, and prevented their worth from being properly seen or acknowledged. As dross is useless, and fit for nothing but to be cast away, and does not improve by being thrown into the fire, so the children of Judah were become unprofitable to God and themselves; and though he had repeatedly thrown them into the furnace of affliction, they were not thereby made better. Hence saith the Lord, by the prophet Jeremiah, ‘In vain have I smitten their children, they received no correction †.’—*They were mixed with water.* This figurative expression seems to be of the same import with the former, and therefore it is unnecessary to illustrate it at large. It plainly intimates, that those among them who were most excellent and valuable, communicating vigour and stability to the nation, were now greatly corrupted, and mixed with those of very different qualities, who were remarkable for their feebleness and instability. Besides, the worship of the true God was corrupted by idolatry, the holy law of Jehovah was perverted by false expositions and human traditions, the exercise of justice was exchanged for bribery and oppression, whilst sobriety and purity of manners were debased by lewd and unclean practices. In few words,

* Isaiah ix. 17.

† Jer. ii. 30.

Jerusalem had lost her former excellence, and degenerated from the happy state to which she had been advanced; her inhabitants acted the part of a debauched, perfidious woman; and, far from being ashamed of their sinful practices, they had arrived at the highest pitch of wickedness, justifying the crimes they committed. Accordingly, we observe the prophets of the Most High frequently admonishing them, that they were covetous, treacherous, liars, slanderers, and deceivers; and, on these accounts, denouncing the most awful judgments against them. Notwithstanding, they would not hearken, or believe them: they flattered themselves that they were pure and excellent, as silver and wine; whereas, upon trial, they were found to be dross, and mixed with water.—This warns us of the danger of defection from God, by which we lose every thing truly excellent and valuable, and become worthless and unprofitable to ourselves and others. It cautions us also against trusting to external privileges, and from thence forming an estimate of our character, which, in fact, may be very different from what we presumptuously imagine. It reminds us, that the omniscient God perfectly observes every mixture in our character, and every adulteration in his worship and service; which ought to engage us to study integrity and simplicity of character and conduct.

23 Thy princes *are* rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

In pursuing the subject treated in the two preceding verses, the corruption, covetousness, and injustice of great men are here described in strong terms.—The princes intended, were doubtless the nobles and judges of the land, the chief priests of the people,
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together with the principal men of the tribes and families. These, it is affirmed, were rebellious; they had revolted from subjection to God; they had acted in hostility against their rightful Sovereign, and shamefully apostatized from the worship of the true God, serving idols, and following their own wicked inventions; and, therefore, they justly deserved this character. Deplorable indeed was the condition of that people, whose great men, instead of setting examples of firm attachment to the service of God, and a zealous concern for his glory, stood at the head of that groundless rebellion with which they are charged.—*And companions of thieves.* They were not only bad themselves, but they frequented the worst of company. Fraudulent practices were not only committed and countenanced by the princes of Judah, but so abandoned were they to all sense of propriety of conduct, and a becoming regard for equity, and the honour of their exalted station, that they associated with persons of the worst character, and who were addicted to the most criminal pursuits. Thieves, the pests of society, the contemners of the law of Jehovah, and the destroyers of their own souls, whose company ought carefully to be shunned by every good man, especially by those of high rank; these were the companions of the princes of Judah. In consequence of this profligacy of manners in the leaders of that people, dishonesty and fraud became so prevalent among them, that, in the words of the prophet Jeremiah, ‘From the least even to the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness*.’—It is added, *Every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards.* The gifts referred to, were not presents generously offered by one person to another, purely as proofs of real respect and heart-kindness, or as grateful acknowledgments of favours received. Such gifts are worthy of esteem, and may lawfully be desired, as

* Jer. vi. 13.

agreeable fruits of that mutual love which is the fulfilling of the law, and which causeth many thanksgivings unto God. The rewards spoken of, were bribes given to these called princes, by those who had causes depending before them, in order to procure favourable decisions, or to make powerful interest in their behalf. This corrupt practice was strictly prohibited in the law of God delivered to this people, as it tended to blind the eyes, and pervert the judgment, so as to hinder a clear discernment between right and wrong. Notwithstanding, their princes had arrived at such an enormous pitch of wickedness that they were generally fond of gifts.—Nor was this all; they went farther; they followed after rewards, greedily looking to receive some recompence from those whom they had served by their influence, and the sentences they had pronounced, whereby their interest was advanced and secured. These recompences of iniquity they keenly sought after, and endeavoured by every mean to procure.

They judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them. Orphans bereaved of their parents, and widows deprived of their husbands who are their counsellors and guardians, being in a helpless condition, it is incumbent, in a special manner, on those who are invested with the office of judges, to imitate the character of the blessed God, who is a father of the fatherless, and the judge of the widow. The will of the supreme Judge, on this subject, is plain and explicit; ‘Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child*.’ More is evidently intended in these words than expressed: ye must not only refrain from injuring them, but it is required, that ye protect them, plead their cause, and do them good. Far from obeying this plain precept, often inculcated in the law of God, the princes spoken of, declined judging the causes of the fatherless, and did not permit the matters wherein

* Exod. xxii. 22.

widows were concerned to come unto them. In consequence of which, the most indigent part of the nation, whom they were exalted to support and protect, were either excluded from justice altogether, or the decision of their causes was shamefully delayed, to make room for those from whom gifts and rewards might be expected.—Execrable practices! Miserable people! Their princes, who ought to have been exemplary in their conduct, for unshaken fidelity to the God of their fathers, and dutiful subjection to his laws, had become disobedient and rebellious against the divine authority. They, whose business it was to have punished thieves, and every species of fraud, had become oppressors of the poor, and were intimately connected with the dishonest and thievish part of the nation. They, who ought to have established the land, by an impartial distribution of justice among the people over whom they presided, loved gifts, and sought after rewards, whereby they exposed the nation to destruction. The causes of the orphans and widows, which merited a candid discussion, and speedy determination, were delayed or neglected; whilst those who had more money, and greater interest, procured a favourable hearing and judgment. Such was the corrupt state of Jerusalem in the days of Ahaz, king of Judah; the account of which divine wisdom hath transmitted to us, on whom the ends of the world are come, that we may learn to avoid those aggravated sins which exposed them to the awful judgments of God. May we be so happy as derive this useful practical instruction from this subject; and, keeping their folly and danger fully in our view, let us, in our different stations, steer an opposite course to that which proved their ruin.

24 Therefore saith the LORD, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies.

This

This verse contains a sublime description of the Most High, who threatens to execute vengeance on those who had perverted judgment.—*Therefore saith the Lord*, the glorious independent Jehovah, the Creator and Proprietor of the whole earth; the Lord of lords, of all those who are dignified among men with this character; the Lord of hosts, who is possessed of universal dominion over heaven and earth, over angels and men, to whom all nature is subject, who hath sovereign authority to dispose of all persons according to his pleasure, and to order all events according to the counsel of his own will. He who hath all the hosts of heaven and earth under his command, can never want instruments to execute his designs, nor ability to inflict the threatenings he denounces; which, when prefaced in the manner before us, must appear exceedingly awful. If where the word of a king is there is power, what majesty and authority attends the declarations of the King of kings!—It is added, *The mighty One of Israel*. This character is repeatedly ascribed to the Most High God in scripture. The patriarch Jacob, in the blessing he pronounced upon his son Joseph, hath these remarkable words; ‘His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*,’ who was surnamed Israel. David supplicates, that the Lord would remember how he vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob†. He is indeed the mighty One, who made and upholdeth all things by the word of his power, who can easily vanquish all the enemies of his people, protect them from all evil in the paths of obedience, and who will take vengeance on their evil inventions, and acts of rebellion against him. And he is the mighty One of Israel, being the God of that eminent patriarch, and his numerous posterity, called by the name of their father, in whose behalf he gloriously

* Gen. xlix. 24.

† Psal. cxxxii. 2.

exerted his almighty power, as a prelude of the great things he would do in after-ages for his true Israel. These characters seem to be here mentioned, to strike terror into his adversaries, and to fill them with dread of his righteous vengeance, who is almighty, not only to protect his upright servants, but to punish obstinate transgressors.

Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies. This awful declaration begins, you see, with the word *Ah*; which may be considered as significant of grief and compassion, arising from the view of what is threatened; and as expressive of triumph, in the prospect of rendering just recompence to his enemies, and obtaining certain victory over those adversaries who are here described.—Both phrases before us seem to be of the same import, the one serving to illustrate and explain the other. By the adversaries of God, on whom he declares he will avenge himself, primarily intended, were the hypocritical and rebellious among the Jews, who pretended to be his peculiar people, and yet refused to obey his commands, and opposed his interests both in their words and actions. All the powers of their minds, and all their principles of action were corrupted; their wills and affections ran counter to the good pleasure of Jehovah; they choosed the abominations he had forbidden, and shewed a strong disaffection to his government: hence they are said to have walked contrary to him. The proofs of this character are numerous, and very clear, in the mean and dishonourable opinion they entertained of the perfections and glory of his divine nature; in their fixed aversion to his service, which they wickedly forsook, that they might serve other gods; and their many departures from him, whilst they professed to be a people near unto him. It is unnecessary to produce evidences of a fact, clear as the sun in the firmament, and recorded by eternal truth.—What, then, are we better than they? No, in no wise; we, as well as they, are all under

under sin, enemies to God in our minds, and by wicked works. Have not we often esteemed the vanities of this world, yea, and sinful pleasures, more than the Living God? Have not we preferred many other objects to him? Have not we frequently cast his laws behind our backs, and rejected the offers of his glorious grace. It is true, that, through the kind restraints of providence and grace, by means of affliction, the fear of disgrace or punishment, or a regard to our own interest, we may have been happily preserved from those gross enormities whereby some have demonstrated themselves the enemies of God; but this will not exempt us from coming under this description. Nor will the seeming respect we pay to God, in consequence of good education, the restraints of fear, or prospects of advantage, or the favourable opinion we have of ourselves, prove that this character does not belong to us.

Concerning such God saith, He will ease and avenge himself. The first of these expressions imports, that the enemies of God are a burden to him. Though he upholds all things by the word of his power, 'he is wearied by mens iniquities, and pressed with their sins as a cart is pressed with sheaves.' Various are the ways in which God eases himself of his adversaries. Sometimes, in a day of his power, he slays the enmity of their hearts; he disposes them to throw down the weapons of their rebellion, reconciles them to himself by the blood of his Son, and renders them his dutiful subjects. But this is not what is here intended, as is evident from the following clause of the verse, where this expression is explained, by his avenging himself on his enemies. He will do himself justice, by punishing them according to their desert, and vindicating his own rights. Thus will he rescue his name from the foul aspersions whereby it hath been injured; he will relieve his patience of the insupportable load it hath long sustained, and deliver the earth from that oppressive burden
under

under which it hath groaned. This vengeance he, in some measure, inflicts in this world, by deserved judgments on those who have acted in hostility against him, though he often reserves the execution of it on individuals until the day of final recompence, when he will take vengeance on all who have not obeyed his gospel. Thus he avenged himself on the rebellious Jews, by the sword of the Chaldeans, by famine, and other dreadful calamities, on account of the abominations they committed: and, by this procedure, God declares he would be eased, or quieted. This expression, used in accommodation to our weakness, must be explained in consistency with the perfection of the divine nature. When men are highly displeased with those who have offended them, they rest not until their injured honour hath been repaired, and then they are at ease. In allusion to this practice, with which we are acquainted, the blessed God, of whose existence and manner of acting we are in great measure ignorant, says he is eased. I will not say more on this delicate subject, lest I should darken counsel by words without knowledge.—Do any of you then provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are you stronger than he? Will your hearts endure, or your hands be strong, in the day of his righteous vengeance? Will you be able to defend yourself, to escape out of his hand, or to sustain the awful weight of his wrath? ‘His hand shall find out all his enemies, his right hand shall find out all those that hate him*.’ O that you would seriously lay to heart this interesting consideration, that thereby you may be induced to acquaint yourselves with him, and to be at peace, and so good shall come unto you!

25 ¶ And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.

* Psal. xxi. 8.

God here promises to purify his people from the corruption and hypocrisy which had crept in among them.—Turning the hand must denote, that God, infinitely gracious, would change his method of acting toward his people, and mercifully alter his dispensations respecting them. In this sense the expression is used by our prophet, where he promises, ‘The Lord shall set his hand again the second time, to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left*.’ It is evident, from the judgment threatened in the foregoing verse, and the mercy foretold in the following words, that the phrase is intended to signify a favourable change in the divine procedure. Its import then will be shortly this: Though the Most High God, justly offended with the heinous provocations of a hypocritical people, would severely punish them for their multiplied transgressions, yet, in the midst of deserved wrath, he would remember mercy, and reverse his awful dispensations. Accordingly, we observe the strain of this prophecy is here changed: the thick cloud, that seemed ready to burst with impending judgments, now appears luminous, and showers down promised mercies. What a happy change was this, attended with the most desirable effects, richly deserving to be marked with admiration and gratitude!

And purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin. The dross here mentioned, like that spoken of in the 22d verse, must be understood in its figurative sense, denoting that corruption and sin which obscured the amiable lustre and beauty of which the people of Judah would otherwise have been possessed, that gave them a deceitful appearance, rendered them of little value, and made it necessary for God to purify them in the furnace of affliction.—Tin in itself is a useful metal, that may be converted to valuable purposes, though, in comparison of silver, it has but

* Isaiah xi. 11.

little value or beauty. In a metaphorical sense, in which it is here used, it denotes that dissimulation and hypocrisy which had intermixed themselves with Judah to a very great degree. In the expression before us, the better sort of that people are considered as the silver, or some other precious metal, which was to be purified, being mixed with much dross and other worthless stuff; *i. e.* with much remaining corruption and hypocrisy, from which it was necessary they should be purged. Besides, they were interspersed among the idolatrous, profane, and hypocritical, whom God, by the prophet Ezekiel, calls, 'The dross and 'the tin *;' from the destructive influence of whose wicked practices it was highly proper they should be delivered. Though, in general, they reckoned themselves pure and precious as silver, whilst they cried, 'The temple of the Lord are these,' great part of them were no better than dross and tin; for, according to the testimony of the prophets, 'They did evil with 'both hands greedily: they were as briars and 'thorns, and the rest were as scorpions; and the 'iniquity of the house of Israel was exceeding great.' In mercy therefore to the godly, and in judgment to the wicked, God promises, that he would make a thorough separation between them in the furnace of affliction, when the wicked should be consumed in the fire of his wrath, and his peculiar people purified and preserved. He also foretels, that, by this trying operation, they who were as silver, the upright worshippers and faithful servants of God, should be purified from the dross of their iniquities, and the tin of hypocrisy, which had spoiled their beauty, and diminished their value. This happy event was foretold at great length, by the prophet Ezekiel, when the word of the Lord came unto him: of which we read, Chap. xxii. 17. and following verses; to which I beg your attention, because what is here predicted is there

* Ezek xxii. 18.

amplified and explained.—This prediction clearly points out the uniform procedure of Jehovah respecting his degenerate people, both in their social and personal capacity; whilst it holds forth the ground of that encouragement, whereby their hopes of complete purification are supported. It was fulfilled at the Babylonish captivity, so far as the state of the church at that period permitted, when the wicked among the men of Judah were melted and consumed, and the saints of the Most High were purified and preserved; and, in different ages of the church of God, it hath received, and still continues to receive, farther completion. When the church of Ephesus left her first love; when the church of Pergamos turned aside after the doctrine of Balaam; when the church of Thyatira was seduced by that wicked woman Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess; when the church of Sardis abated in zeal, and Laodicea became lukewarm; they were cast into great tribulation, and there they were tried and purified. And we, my brethren, in our present degenerate state, have reason to expect, that God, by means of awful judgments he already threatens to inflict, will purge away the corruption and hypocrisy which have lamentably diffused their influence among us. Let it be our concern then, that all the afflictions and trials wherewith we are visited, may be made effectual, through the kind providence, and powerful blessing of God, for weakening our corruptions, and purifying our graces.

26 And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.

The restoration of the people of Judah to their ancient aristocratical or democratical state is here promised, together with its happy consequences.—

Both

Both expressions in the first part of the verse seem to be nearly of the same import, and refer to the same great event, which happened after the return of the Jews from their captivity at Babylon. God promises, at that period, to restore them judges as at the first. It deserves to be remarked, that kings are not here mentioned, though by them the posterity of Israel had been governed for a long period of time, previous to the Jews being led captive by the Chaldeans; which plainly intimates, that after that memorable occasion they were to be no longer ruled by regal authority. There are two kinds of judges spoken of in scripture. There were extraordinary persons who sustained this character, whom God, in mercy, raised up to vindicate his people from the power of their enemies, who oppressed them, and who decided controversies of the greatest moment. These are spoken of, Judges ii. 16.; where we are told, ‘The Lord raised up judges, who delivered them out of the hands of those that spoiled them.’ There were also ordinary magistrates, or governors of cities, on whom this character was bestowed; whose business was to guard the privileges of the people, and to attend to the impartial distribution of justice. For the execution of these, and similar important purposes, God required, ‘Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment*.’ These last are doubtless intended here.

With them counsellors are joined, by whose advice, and under whose direction, the affairs of the state were to be conducted. They were not merely the counsellors of kings, or their prime ministers, whose office is to assist the Sovereign in the management of public affairs, but persons who were themselves to have the sole direction of the state, without regard to the royal authority of a Prince.

* Deut. xvi. 18.

Look back then to the period referred to, namely, the first erection of this people into a nation, and you may be able exactly to ascertain the import of this promise. Then you will observe, Moses, under the direction of the supreme Legislator, forming the children of Israel into a republic, and ‘appointing over
 ‘ them judges and rulers, able men, such as feared
 ‘ God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and mak-
 ‘ ing them rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds,
 ‘ fifties, and tens, that they might judge them*.’” These were called the judges and elders of Israel: and afterward, by the express command of God, their number was fixed to that of seventy, on whom he put his Spirit, to qualify them for the duties of their function. Such were the judges and counsellors of that people at the beginning; and now God promises, that, at the time referred to, they should be restored to the same kind of government they at first enjoyed, and that it should be managed by men of similar probity and abilities. Accordingly, Ezra the scribe, a man remarkable for prudence and piety, and a firm attachment to the law of God, was employed, by divine providence, to effectuate this restoration; the remains of which were visible in the time of our Lord’s humiliation, when we read of the sanhedrim, consisting of seventy able men, and of one Nicodemus, an honourable counsellor.—From hence we learn, that judges and counsellors are the wise appointment, and generous gifts of God, to those who are favoured with them. Let us honour them as his ministers to us for good, Let us pray, that he may give them counsel, and that they may be just, ruling in his fear; and let us subject ourselves to them, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. Let us be afraid of that which is evil, remembering they bear not the sword in vain; and ever study to do that which is good, that we may have praise of the same.

* Exod. xxviii. 21.

Afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. The time in general when this prediction should be fulfilled is mentioned, but the precise period is not determined; which leaves room for conjecture when this description was applicable to the Jewish state, and their metropolis. It is promised, this should happen after the restoration foretold in the preceding part of this verse, whilst they were governed by upright judges, and wise counsellors. After their return from captivity at Babylon, and this form of government was established among them, it was long before they arrived at this desirable condition, and could, with any propriety, be named a city of righteousness, or faithful city, as is abundantly evident from the writings of the prophets. This remark obliges us to have recourse to a period remote from the commencement of the promised restoration, which, however, arrived during its continuance; namely, after Jerusalem was visited by Jesus Christ the righteous, and became the seat of his kingdom of righteousness. Then it merited this description, for righteousness was therein honoured, loved, and practised. The eternal righteousness of Jehovah was there richly displayed, in his providences, laws, and judgments, which were humbly adored, and gratefully celebrated. The righteousness of God, without the law, witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, by faith of Jesus Christ, was unto all, and upon all them that believed: and that righteousness which exalteth a city, the effect whereof is quietness and assurance for ever, was highly respected, and carefully practised, by many of its inhabitants.—Nor was it less remarkable for being a faithful city. Many of the called and faithful resided within her walls, who happily demonstrated their fidelity to God in very trying circumstances, and were faithful to the death, in adhering to his truths and ways: and, among all the churches of the saints, none were more famous for a firm

firm attachment to the institutions and example of Jesus Christ, than that which was erected at Jerusalem.—Animated with the ardent desire of meriting this noble character, let each of us, in our different capacities, endeavour to be righteous and faithful, that we may contribute our part toward that desirable restoration, which will bring us under the description now considered.

27 Zion shall be redeemed with judgment; and her converts with righteousness.

In this verse the redemption of the people of God is foretold, and the manner in which it should be executed is pointed out.—Zion, a name signifying *a monument erected*, was a mountain on which part of the city Jerusalem was built, wherein God was pleased to fix his peculiar residence. On one summit of this mountain stood the sacred temple, in which the solemn exercises of divine worship were performed; and on the other, the palace of the kings of the house of David: both of which were typical of the church of Jesus Christ, wherein he exercises his sacerdotal and regal characters. Great things are spoken in the scriptures concerning Zion. The Most High is said to delight to dwell there: Jesus Christ is said to reign over it for ever and ever: the gospel, which is called his law, with salvation, and all the blessings it contains, are said to proceed from thence. It was celebrated for being the joy of the whole earth, because God was known in her palaces for a refuge, and in his temple every one spoke of his glory: and innumerable, exceeding great, and precious promises are given to Zion; among which the one now before us holds an eminent place. Now it must be evident, that these, and many similar great things, were not spoken chiefly of the literal Zion, nor intended to be fully accomplished to it; but to another, even a spiritual Zion, of which that above mentioned was only a figure.

figure. This can be no other than the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerufalem, poffeffed by the fpiritual pofterity of Abraham, believing in the Son of God as the only Saviour, embracing his doctrines, and fubmitting to his authority, who are honoured with the peculiar prefence of God in the institutions of his worship, and over whom Jefus Chrift prefides as their rightful Sovereign. Ye may obferve in the word of God, that the name of the type is fometimes given to that which it was defigned to represent, of which many instances might be produced. Our bleffed Saviour is called our paffover, becaufe in that divine institution he was eminently prefigured, and that ordinance received its completion in his facrifice for us. In like manner, the church of God is frequently fpoken of under the name of Zion, becaufe the temple and palace, the inhabitants, and worship performed in that mountain, exhibited a ftriking representation of that facred fociety, its glorious immunities; and folemn fervices. In the verfe before us, Zion, in the literal fenfe, was no doubt primarily intended, not exclusive of the fpiritual Zion, which feems to be the chief fubject of what is here foretold. Attention to thefe few remarks will affift us in understanding this prediction, and in afcertaining the import of the redemption here promifed; and it will be very proper we frequently recollect them, in our progrefs through this prophecy, when we meet with Zion.

Her converts, or, as the Hebrew word is tranflated, in the margent of fome of your Bibles, *they that return of her*. The one of thefe expreffions illustrates and explains the other; and teaches us, that the perfons fpoken of are thofe who turn from their evil ways, and return unto him from whom the children of Ifrael have deeply revolted; who turn from the fervice of dead idols, and lying vanities, to ferve the Living God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, even Jefus, who delivereth us from the wrath to
 come.

come. They are those whom the Lord, by his divine power accompanying the gospel, hath turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified. Such are the converts of Zion, concerning whom it is foretold,

They shall be redeemed. To redeem, is to buy again that which was alienated from its proper owner, by sale or mortgage, and to restore it to its rightful possessor; in which sense it is used, Lev. xxv. 25. respecting the possession of a poor brother. It also signifies, to rescue by force; or, by paying down a ransom, to deliver from captivity and slavery, and to restore to liberty and happiness. In this manner the children of Israel were redeemed from their bondage in Egypt, and afterward from their captivity at Babylon; which deliverances were typical of the redemption of the spiritual Israel of God from their spiritual servitude and captivity, and their introduction to the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Though the redemption foretold might have a primary reference to some temporal deliverance of the Jewish state, to me it appears, that this is one of the passages wherein (as a learned, and justly celebrated writer observes), “the inspired prophets immediately employed, and perhaps believing themselves to be solely employed, in predicting the occurrences of the Jewish state, were at the same time prelude, as it were, to the person and dispensation of Jesus; the Holy Spirit which inspired them bearing out their expressions, and enlarging their conceptions, beyond the worth and size of those objects which came directly in their view*.” Let us then fix our attention on the spiritual and eternal salvation of the people of God, which seems to be here chiefly intended. This redemption naturally sup-

* Dr. Hurd on Prophecy, Serm. iii.

poses, that those who are the objects of it are in a state of spiritual servitude to corruption and sin, and led captive by the god of this world, agreeable to the descriptions given in scripture of their condition prior to their redemption. It certainly implies, that Zion is hereby delivered from all her iniquities, and their dreadful effects; from all her enemies, and their destructive power; and invested in the possession of the most glorious privileges, in the most astonishing, and at the same time endearing manner, through the gracious interposition of the Son of God. This, brethren, is not the release of an oppressed nation from despotic tyranny: nor does it relate to the erection of a mighty empire, under a renowned earthly prince. It is another, and far more glorious deliverance, in comparison of which all the noblest achievements of the greatest heroes are as nothing. Hereby chosen men are rescued from eternal ruin, sin is destroyed, death is abolished, principalities and powers are conquered, and human nature is purified, and exalted to the image and enjoyment of God. This is the great redemption in Israel, which was spoken of by all the holy prophets which have been since the world began, typified under the former dispensation, expected and desired in every age until these last days, when it was effectuated, not by such corruptible things as silver and gold, or such unavailable things as thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil, but with the precious blood of Christ. This prediction then was fulfilled, when, by his death, he obtained eternal redemption for us; and it continues to receive still farther completion, when, by the ministration of the gospel, and the agency of the Holy Spirit, the converts of Zion are interested in the blessings of this redemption. May this be our happiness! Let this be our chief concern!

With judgment, and with righteousness. The temporal deliverance which God was to work for his ancient people, primarily intended, was to be executed
with.

with, or in judgment, in the exercise of strict justice, punishing the incorrigibly wicked, and delivering the upright.—And with righteousness, by the faithful accomplishment of divine threatenings and promises.—The spiritual redemption of Zion, the principal subject of this prediction, is obtained with judgment, in the full sense of the expression. It is acquired, not in a rash and precipitant manner, but is the result of wise counsel, and mature deliberation: it is executed in perfect consistency with the rights of the strictest justice and equity, according to the determination of the righteous judgment of God; and it is purchased, by inflicting those awful punishments to which the converts of Zion had exposed themselves by their transgressions, on Jesus Christ, the blessed Author of this redemption, who came to give his life a ransom for many. This admirable work is much insisted on, both in the prophetic and apostolic writings; where we are taught, ‘That he made his soul an offering for sin *;’ and ‘that he became an offering for sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him †.’—It is added, that the redemption of Zion shall be with righteousness, with the richest displays of the consummate righteousness of Jehovah; for the declaration of which, ‘God set forth his own Son to be a propitiation, that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus,’ as it is written, Rom. iii. 25, 26. Redemption is the blessed fruit of the everlasting righteousness of Jesus Christ, which he brought in by his obedience even unto death: hence it is said, ‘To be obtained through the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ †.’ And it is enjoyed by the citizens of Zion, in the exercises of righteousness, in which they yield to God the obedience of faith, and that unlimited subjection to his authority which he requires.—This is truly an

* Isaiah liii. 10.

† 2 Cor. v. 21.

‡ 2 Pet. i. 1.

interest.

interesting subject, which I wish you would study much, and endeavour to acquire an experimental acquaintance with. It is a subject which, if you indeed relish, you will find to be exceedingly agreeable and useful; which may be always contemplated with new pleasure and profit, and which, after your utmost efforts, cannot be exhausted. And if you are the redeemed of the Lord, keep ever in view the great design of your redemption, that ye may be unto God a peculiar people, zealous of good works, and live under the habitual impression of the manifold obligations you are brought under, by this character, to serve and glorify God.

28 ¶ And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners *shall be* together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

We are now arrived at the last part of this elegant, prophetic discourse, which describes the punishment to be inflicted on the adversaries of God, who condemn the redemption of Zion. Of these, three classes are mentioned, whose characters seem to be in some measure distinct, because the prophet foretels that their destruction shall be together.—The transgressors are those who, having perversely renounced their dutiful subjection to the divine authority, and wickedly forsaken the instituted worship and ordinances of Jehovah, followed those superstitious and idolatrous practices, whereby they provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel.—The sinners are such as, having gone astray from the paths of righteousness, have entered into the ways of impiety and wickedness; who, regardless of advancing the glory of God, aim no higher than to promote their worldly honour, interest, or pleasure.—By them that forsake the Lord, may be intended, those who, having apostatized from their former profession of fidelity in the service of the Living God, in the duties of his worship, and the obedience

obedience of his commands, embraced the most dangerous errors, and were addicted to the most abominable practices. These characters, which I stay not farther to illustrate at present, though somewhat different, are evidently very similar; and the same destruction shall be the certain portion of them all.—Attend then to the description you have now heard, and diligently compare your character and conduct with it, that so you may be assisted in estimating your spiritual condition, with which it is of great importance that you be intimately acquainted, in order to your improvement by the gospel, and its sacred institutions.

And the destruction of these shall be together, and they shall be consumed. The Hebrew word translated *destruction*, is derived from one that signifies, *to break in pieces things that are hard*. In a metaphorical sense, it is applied to denote contrition of heart, whereby it is broken in pieces, and its natural pride and obduracy is subdued. It is also used to signify, any calamity, ruin, or destruction, which reverse the condition of those on whom they seize. Of these there are two sorts; those that are inflicted on men in this world, such as the sword, famine, and pestilence, which bring on temporal destruction; and those which are called spiritual judgments, as they respect the souls of men, and are inflicted partly in this, and chiefly in the future world. Both these may be included in the prediction before us; for the expression contained in the latter part of the verse assures us, that persons of the above description shall be consumed together. Whilst the Governor among the nations corrects his own people in measure for their sins, to make them sensible, that it is an evil and bitter thing to depart from him, he sends awful destruction on transgressors and sinners, and those who forsake him. Whilst the former adopt the spirited language of the apostle Paul, ‘ We are troubled on every side, yet
 ‘ not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;
 ‘ persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not
 ‘ destroyed.

‘ destroyed * :’ the latter, with despondency, complain, We are not only troubled, but distressed; not only perplexed, but in despair; not only persecuted, but forsaken; not only cast down, but destroyed. This is the portion of them that forsake the Lord: and it is their just punishment, perfectly consistent with the most unbiassed equity; which requires, that they be recompensed according to their ways, and that they eat the fruit of their own doings.—This, brethren, is an interesting truth, which ought to penetrate to the bottom of your hearts. Are any of you sensible that you are transgressors, and that you have forsaken the Lord, and afraid lest he send upon you that horrible tempest whereby you shall be destroyed? I beseech you to flee without delay, and hide you from the storm: not under shelter of the creature, which cannot protect you; but under his shadow, ‘ Who is a
 ‘ hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tem-
 ‘ pest, as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the
 ‘ shadow of a great rock in a weary land.’ Then ‘ in
 ‘ famine, he shall redeem thee from death; and in
 ‘ war, from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be
 ‘ hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt
 ‘ thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh †.’

29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.

The ignominy and disgrace wherewith the threatened punishment should be accompanied, is here pointed out.—There is a remarkable change of persons in the verse before us, which requires to be attended to, in order to our understanding the prediction it contains. The persons primarily spoken of, and referred to in the word *they*, are the transgressors, sinners, and such as forsake the Lord, mentioned in the foregoing

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

† Job. v. 20, 21.

verse. These, in whatever country or generation they may live, shall certainly share in the shame and confusion which is the portion of those to whom the prophet immediately addressed himself.—The oaks which ye have desired, the gardens that ye have chosen, are the objects which should occasion the shame and confusion which are here threatened. It is obvious from many passages of scripture, I stay not at present to recite, that groves or gardens were often planted, and frequented by those who forsook the Lord, and were addicted to idolatrous practices. These groves were composed of trees of various kinds, which cannot now be determined with certainty; and among these was the oak, which afforded an agreeable shade from the heat, and a desirable concealment from public view. In these gardens, temples and altars were erected to the gods who were worshipped; various rites were performed, and sacrifices were offered, to idols, by their votaries. This abominable superstition and idolatry constituted a principal part of what was called the religion of the nations, whom the Lord expelled from the land of Canaan, to make room for his people Israel, who were commanded to destroy their groves, and other monuments of their false worship: ‘Ye shall utterly
 ‘ destroy all the places wherein the nations which ye
 ‘ shall possess served their gods, upon the high moun-
 ‘ tains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree.
 ‘ And you shall overthrow their altars, and break
 ‘ their pillars, and burn their groves with fire *,’ &c.
 Notwithstanding this charge, the men of Israel and Judah were much addicted to idolatry, as we learn from the testimony of the prophets, who were employed in reproving them for their sins; of which you will see a memorable instance, Hosea iv. 12, 13. Prompted by curiosity, excited by this surprising fact, let us inquire into the reasons why that people

* Deut. xii. 2, 3.

were so fond of these forbidden practices. Among others, we may suppose their perverse dispositions would operate powerfully, which ever inclined them to do what was forbidden: their desire to imitate the example of their great progenitor, Abraham, who planted a grove, when he called upon the name of God * (though this practice was afterward strictly forbidden †): and the foolish imagination, that such retired, solemn places as they enjoyed under the shade of thick trees, and in gardens, inspired them with reverence and awe, might contribute to make them fond of such retirements; which afforded them opportunity of committing the most detestable impurities, and the most odious superstition.—It is true, indeed, that we read of some great and good men who sacrificed under an oak, and upon a high place; as Gideon, Samuel, and others. Certain it is, that they either did that which was unlawful, or for which they had some particular dispensation from God himself. Concerning these oaks and gardens it is foretold,

They shall be ashamed, and ye shall be confounded. These two expressions are of similar import, and seem to denote nearly the same thing.—The word translated *ashamed*, signifies *to blush* or *redden*, *to become pale*, when the colour changes, and the frame is disordered: and that which is rendered *confounded*, signifies *to dig*, in order to hide any thing; as the slothful servant did, that he might hide his lord's money. Hence it is used to denote a person's being confounded; because, in that condition, he would fondly hide himself, if in his power. Shame and confusion arise from a sense of having acted contrary to duty and interest, or from being disappointed of what we expected to enjoy. In the penitential confessions of the saints, recorded in scripture, they often acknowledge, that they were ashamed and confounded on account of their sins. But this is not what is

* Gen. xxi. 33.

† Deut. xii. 13, 14.

intended in the prediction before us. The persons described in the foregoing verse, should feel the most cutting remorse, and painful disgrace, at the time destruction seized upon them, on account of the foolish and wicked part they had acted. Their sins being brought to remembrance, by impending judgments, they shall be ashamed at their past conduct, and confounded at the prospect of being recompensed according to their deeds. Then they shall be filled with shame, in the recollection of the oaks and gardens in which they once delighted, wherein they worshipped the idols in which they trusted for deliverance, and covered with confusion when all their hopes from them shall be disappointed.—This prophecy was awfully verified, in the consternation and disgrace which attended the destruction of the wicked among the Jews, when their nation and city was overthrown by the Romans; and it shall be farther accomplished, in the day of the perdition of ungodly men, when they shall implore the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and hide them.—Beware then, brethren, of forsaking the Lord your God, and thereby exposing yourselves to that everlasting shame and contempt, which shall be the certain portion of all who continue to go astray from him. If you are found at last among the unhappy number of sinners and transgressors, all your claims shall be rejected, all your hopes shall be dashed to the ground: you shall be commanded to depart from him on whom all your expectations ought to be founded, and be for ever excluded from the society of the just. This must be an insupportable disgrace, which, I pray you, take care in time to prevent.

30 For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf faileth, and as a garden that hath no water.

By a double comparison, naturally suggested by what was said in the preceding verse, the deplorable
 Q condition

condition of transgressors is represented.—Both good and bad men are, with great propriety, compared, in scripture, to trees of various kinds, in their different conditions. In the first Psalm, ‘He that delighteth in the law of the Lord, and meditateth therein day and night, is compared to a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.’ The state of transgressors is also exhibited by this instructive similitude, Jer. xvii. 5, 6, where it is foretold, ‘That he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord, shall be like the heath (or a naked tree) in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh.’ And in the words before us, sinners, who forsake the Lord, are likened to an oak whose leaf faileth. They resemble an oak that hath grown to a vast size and height, that promises stability and duration, which yet quickly decays, loses every symptom of life, and every ornament of beauty, and then dies to the very root. In like manner, transgressors among the professing people of God, destitute of spiritual beauty, the leaves of profession, and the fruits of righteousness, and incapable of affording protection and consolation to others, through sin reigning in them, decay and perish in that death which is its wages.—Another similitude is here used, the more fully to describe their condition: *And as a garden that hath no water.* In order to your understanding this expression, you must know, that, in hot Eastern countries, a constant supply of water is absolutely necessary to the fruitfulness and beauty of their gardens, without which every thing would soon languish and decay. Great care, therefore, must be taken to provide them with suitable supplies of water, either from some neighbouring fountain or river, by directing a few streams to run among the trees and plants; or by having a large reservoir filled, in proper season, with a sufficient quantity of rain water. Accordingly, to complete the beauty of the garden of God, wherein our first parents

rents were placed, we are told, a river went out of Eden to water it. We are informed, by modern travellers, of the delightful gardens of the East, which are pleasantly watered, ever verdant, and fruitful. In opposition to this beauty and fertility, it is foretold, that the persons spoken of shall be as a garden that hath no water. Though residing within the limits of the church, which the Most High hath appropriated to himself, as the garden wherein he delighteth, this privilege shall not avail them. If they participate not of the benign influence of his word, and the reviving communications which flow from the fountain of all grace, and remain destitute of the fruits of the Spirit, they shall wither, languish, and die.—This part of the prophecy, with that contained in the former verse, was fulfilled at the destruction of the Jewish nation, which once resembled in firmness and grandeur the stately oak. But like that tree when its leaf faileth, and like that garden which hath no water, its appearance was quickly reversed: the wicked inhabitants of Judea were deprived of the gospel, the gifts of the Spirit, and the communications of divine grace, which were turned into a new channel; so that this prediction was amply verified.—Hereby we are instructed in the uncertain prosperous condition of the wicked, however agreeable and promising may be their present appearance. Though they may seem to be rooted and established like an oak, when the divine displeasure goeth forth against them, they shall suddenly decay; though pleasant to human view, as a garden, they shall speedily be consumed. Let us then diligently take heed, lest, by following their practices, we expose ourselves to their punishment.

31 And the strong shall be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench *them*.

The vast extent and long continuance of the above-mentioned judgments is here foretold, with the utter inability

inability of those against whom they are denounced to deliver themselves.—By the strong we must here understand, not those who are strong in the Lord, and the power of his might, who are furnished with strength in the inward man for every good work; but such as are rich, and great, and powerful in this world; who are possessed of health of body, vigour of mind, and that strength which arises from worldly opulence; who, at the same time, are stout-hearted, and far from righteousness, and, to human view, seem to resemble the sturdy oak. These are the men who commonly glory in their might, in their bodily strength, in their mental abilities, in the extensive power to which they are elevated by their riches and eminent station; nay, even in their stoutness of heart, whereby they withstand the influence of the word of God, and resist the Holy Ghost. Such, I apprehend, are the outlines of the character and condition of the persons here intended by the strong. Though, of all others, they least expect to be consumed, it is foretold, they shall be as tow. However mighty and exalted such may be in this world, yet, like the tow which you separate from your flax, they are really the least valuable part of mankind: they are light and vain, ready to be driven away by every storm of divine judgment; and liable, every moment, to be consumed by the wrath of the Almighty, when it begins to burn. This is a very simple and humiliating comparison, with which you are well acquainted; and which, of consequence, requires little illustration. Whilst it points out the imminent danger of their condition, it sounds an alarm in the ears of all who come under this description, which ought to rouse them to an anxious concern about their salvation.

And the maker of it as a spark; or rather, as it is in the margin of some of your Bibles, And his work as a spark. Good men are the light of the world, whose good works so shine before men, that they are thereby induced to glorify their Father, who is in heaven;

heaven; but the work of those here spoken of, is compared to a spark, the smallest part of fire, which being thrown out from it, is immediately extinguished. This intimates, in a very striking manner, the trifling insignificance and short continuance of their work, though, it may be, they thereby intended to magnify themselves, and greatly boasted of it to others. However much it may be esteemed by themselves, when compared to the cheering light diffused by the servants of God, which illuminates the world, and refreshes its inhabitants, it is only a dying, mischievous spark. I suppose the expression is chiefly designed to represent the danger arising from their work, to those who are strong, in the sense explained, which, like a spark falling on tow, shall kindle those flames of divine wrath, whereby they and their works shall both be consumed: for it is added—*They shall both burn together.* This prediction is similar to that awful threatening, where God thus speaks, by the prophet Ezekiel, ‘I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath, and deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, and skilful to destroy. Thou shalt be for fuel to the fire*,’ &c. To burn, you know, is literally to consume by fire; and, in a metaphorical sense, it denotes painful and terrible destruction. Here it comprehends all those awful calamities which God would inflict, by the fury of the Romans, and other instruments, on the profane and hypocritical among his people, whereby they and their works should be wholly consumed. And that no circumstance might be wanting that could increase the awfulness of this judgment, it is declared—*None shall quench them.* Divine judgments should rage with such unabating fury, that those upon whom they were sent should not be able to resist them, or to deliver themselves from those dread-

* Ezek. xxi. 31, 32.

ful calamities whereby they should be totally overthrown.—This prediction was accomplished in the destruction of the nation, city, and temple of the Jews, related by Josephus their historian: the strong, the rich, and the great men, among that people, were quickly consumed by those remarkable punishments, which all their efforts could not stop in their progress. In this awful prophecy, and the corresponding direful events, we behold the dismal consequences of transgression, and the just retribution of forsaking the Lord. Such terrible calamities were never inflicted upon any city as upon Jerusalem; such vials of wrath were never poured out on any people as upon the Jews, as God himself declares, Ezek. v. 8, 9. Why all this severity? Because they abused more distinguishing privileges than any other people. And why is this subject so frequently mentioned in scripture, but for our admonition, on whom the ends of the world are come? Let us hearken to the admonition, and learn the instruction it is intended to convey; and thus our labour, in considering this prophecy, shall not be in vain in the Lord.

PRELIMI-

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE second part of this prophetic discourse, on which we now enter, is contained in the second, third, and fourth chapters. It was probably delivered, by our prophet, in the days of Jotham, or Uzziah: to which period of time several things mentioned in this prophecy are applicable; particularly, the plenty of silver and gold, spoken of at the 7th verse of this chapter, and the extravagant articles of dress, described in the latter part of the third chapter. It was primarily designed to recall the Jews, to whom it was addressed, from their idolatry and superstition, their pride, self-confidence, and other iniquities, to the fear and worship of the Living God, to the study and obedience of his august laws. With this view, Isaiah begins by contemplating that approaching, happy period, in which a renowned seat of learning should be erected on Mount Zion, over which God himself would preside, as the great Instructor, to which all nations should convene, to be taught the way of salvation, verse 1.—5. From the 6th verse to the end of this chapter, he represents those awful calamities, and terrible judgments, which God would certainly inflict upon the unbelieving, proud, and self-confident among them, on account of their contempt of his authority, and the good counsel he had given them, that thereby he might lead them to repentance.

 C H A P. II.

THE word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

This is the inscription of the prophecy contained in this, and the two following chapters.—The remarkable form of speech here used, is often adopted by the prophets,

prophets, when they mention the revelations where-with they were favoured. The prophecy of Amos thus begins; ‘The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel.’ In like manner, Micah introduces his prophecy; ‘The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite, in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.’ Our prophet likewise uses a familiar expression*, where he speaks of the burden of Babylon, which he saw. Though, properly speaking, a word is not an object of sight, it is to be observed, that what Isaiah here declares he had revealed to him from God, was communicated by a vision, in which he was favoured with a visible representation of what he relates. This remark, I apprehend, fully justifies the form of speech under consideration; which seems designed to intimate, that the prophet received the clearest and most satisfying revelation of what is here recorded.

This prophecy relates to the same persons with the former, namely Judah and Jerusalem, by whom, as I observed from Chap. i. 1. we must understand the people of God, inhabiting those places to whom this message was primarily delivered; who afforded an instructive type of his peculiar people under the New Testament, who are intimately concerned in this subject, recorded for their admonition. In this view, we are deeply interested in the predictions before us; and, therefore, we ought diligently to attend to the important truths we now proceed to consider.

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORDS house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.

* Isaiah xiii. 1.

In these words a most remarkable event, and the time of its accomplishment, is foretold.—The time fixed for the accomplishment of this prophecy, is the last days, an expression which frequently occurs in the Old Testament. Though some commentators suppose the times of the gospel are intended by this phrase, I do not recollect any passage of scripture in which it is used to denote the whole period of that dispensation; nor is it thus understood by the Jews, to whom the oracles of God were committed, so far as I know. The season here referred to, is the concluding period of the Jewish church and state, prior to their abolition; and in this sense the words of the patriarch Jacob are to be explained*, where he informs his sons, what should befall them in the last days, in which the great Messiah was to come, before the sceptre departed from Judah. To this time, I suppose, Balaam looked forward, when he spake of the end of the days. ‘In these last days (as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews remarks), God hath spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things;’ and as the prophet Joel foretold, ‘He poured out his Spirit upon all flesh †,’ &c.—With great propriety is this description given to the last series of God’s dispensations toward his church on earth, the last course of his providence toward this world, and the concluding scene in which the great work of man’s redemption was accomplished. Then, saith the prophet, shall come to pass that which is written,

The mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains. Were these words to be literally explained, they would contain what would seem more like a fable of the poets, than a divine prediction, highly interesting to the church of God, and recorded for its benefit. They would affirm, that the mountain, on which the temple, or the Lord’s house, was anciently built, called Zion, on which also stood

* Gen. xlix. 1.

† Joel ii. 28. *et seq.*

the city Jerusalem, was to be so prepared and established as to be exalted far above all other mountains, such as Sinai and Tabor, Carmel and Hermon; or rather, that it should be removed from off its basis, and be fixed on the tops of the hills. Every one sees the impropriety of such an explanation of the words, assured, that literally Mount Zion shall never be removed. No doubt the splendid edifice which adorned its summit, and the deep valley which lay at the bottom, made it appear immensely high; and as the Jews reckoned the land of Canaan was the highest part of the earth, and this mountain the highest ground of Canaan, they might consider it as exalted above the hills, and established as on the tops of the mountains. But this is not the import of the prophecy, which must be explained in its figurative and spiritual sense.

By the mountain of the Lord's house, we understand the church of Jesus Christ, the holy hill of Zion, over which God hath anointed him King, of which that mountain was an eminent type. The solid rocks, of which it was composed, afforded an instructive emblem of the stability and duration of the church of God, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail: its elevation above the neighbouring grounds, represented the dignity and influence of the church of Christ in its prosperous condition: being seen at a great distance, and enjoying the richest prospects, signified that the church is a city set on a hill, from whence the disciples of Christ are favoured with the most transporting views. In the church of the New Testament, as anciently in the mountain of the Lord's house, the Living God takes up his peculiar residence, so as to dwell in the midst of it; his presence is enjoyed, his glory is seen, and therein he is honoured and served according to his own appointment. In this sense we understand the mountain of the Lord's house, which is here foretold,

Shall be established in the tops of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills. Both expressions seem designed

designed to intimate, that the church of God should be exalted to distinguished dignity; and, on account of the peculiar privileges wherewith it should be invested, should far excel all that are called hills and mountains; and therefore its praises should be celebrated, and its fame spread abroad through the earth. The Son of God was to elevate his church to the highest honour, by appearing in the Lord's house, and there delivering the glorious truths of the gospel; whereby he was to afford a much clearer revelation of the divine glory, and to institute a far more perfect worship, than ever had been ordained from any other mountain, not excepting Sinai itself. He was to give the most wonderful demonstrations of the divine presence among men, the fame whereof should spread through the whole world; so that the nations should be happily disposed to renounce their vain superstitions, to detest their false religions, and to submit to his doctrine and authority.—We behold this prediction verified, when the Son of God, entering Jerusalem and the temple, laid the foundations of his kingdom, taught the ways of God in truth, and qualified his apostles for the faithful performance of his service, by his divine instructions and Holy Spirit. Then the mountain of the Lord's house was honoured with astonishing displays of the gracious presence of God, which were every where published abroad. The blessed consequences were, that the sublime doctrines, inculcated by Jesus Christ and his apostles, founded on eternal truth, which no human or infernal power shall ever be able to subvert, destroyed the false religions professed in the world; so that Mount Zion became far more illustrious and famous than any other mountain in the earth.

And all nations shall flow unto it. The vast concourse of people, which should resort to Zion, are here described in language which hath an obvious reference to the waters of a river flowing on in their course toward the sea. The expression intimates, that

all nations should speedily, and in continued succession, repair to the church of Jesus Christ; whilst one should have powerful influence on another, all should press forward, with progressive force and rapidity, until they were received into its bosom. True, indeed, it is not more contrary to the course of nature, for water to run upward, and flow unto the tops of the mountains, than it is for men, alienated from the life of God, to refrain from walking in the vanity of their minds, and to have recourse to Jesus Christ, that they may participate of the blessings of his church. It ought therefore to be remembered, that the fountain from whence these mighty streams take their rise, which shall convey all nations to the great Redeemer, is in the highest heavens; and as waters rise as high as the spring from which they flow, the multitudes of people, here intended, shall be conducted not only to the house of the Lord, established on the tops of the mountains, but to that not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. How astonishing this event, that all nations, even those who had hitherto walked in their own ways, should resort, in great numbers, to Mount Zion, that they may join themselves to the church of God, in which are inculcated the difficult lessons of self-denial, the study of humility and inward purity, that are opposite and troublesome to human nature in its degenerate state! To excite in the people of God the lively expectation of this unlikely success of things, it was repeatedly foretold, by the prophets Jeremiah and Zechariah *, That Gentiles, as well as Jews, should repair to the church under the New Testament. Such, accordingly, was the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit that attended the doctrine of Jesus Christ preached at Jerusalem, that devout men, of every nation under heaven, came and dwelt in that highly favoured city, as we read in the second chapter and 5th verse of the Acts of the Apostles.

* Jer. iii. 17. Zech. ii. 10. 11.

Because of God's temple at Jerusalem, as the prophet David predicted, 'Kings shall bring presents unto him*.' This prophecy was remarkably fulfilled, in the numerous converts from among the Gentiles, who were gathered into the apostolic church; though, it is hoped, it shall receive a still farther completion in the last days of the gospel-dispensation.—Improve this animating consideration, for strengthening and confirming your faith, in the accomplishment of this, and similar predictions, notwithstanding every intervening difficulty; and for encouraging your earnest prayers to God, for the performance of the glorious things which yet remain to be fulfilled. However unlikely the foretold event may seem, the faithfulness of Jehovah hath never failed; he hath remembered his mercy from generation to generation, and his truth endureth for ever.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

In these words, wherein the nations are represented as inciting one another to repair to the house of the Lord, the subject introduced in the foregoing verse is amplified and illustrated.—The Hebrew word, which is here rendered *many*, signifies also *powerful*; so that many powerful people are the subjects of this prediction, whose numbers and influence shall be very great. From this expression, however, we must not suppose, that it is necessary, to the accomplishment of this prophecy, that whole nations, without exception, should adopt the follow-

* Psa. lxxviii. 29.

ing language. It is sufficient for this purpose, that large numbers of them stir up one another to join in the worship of God, and the obedience of his commands, though the great part among them continue in superstition and idolatry. This remark, I apprehend, is founded in fact, and deserves attention, when we are employed in considering such events as that here foretold. Whilst, therefore, many of the elect of God, dispersed among different nations, as the accomplishment of this prophecy, should invite one another to go up to the house of the Lord, the rest of them may be persisting in criminal idolatry, foolish superstitions, and walking in the vanity of their minds.—Concerning these many people, thus understood, it is foretold, that they shall go and say,

Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. They thus encourage one another, as persons commonly do who are exceedingly fond of the enterprize in which they are engaging, and solicitous that others may join them in what they expect to enjoy the greatest satisfaction. The form of expression here used, is modelled upon an opinion which anciently prevailed among the Jews, which I mentioned when treating of the preceding verse, that the land of Judea, and especially the city Jerusalem, were higher in regard of situation than the countries wherewith they were surrounded: hence we read in the New Testament, of going down from Judea, and going up to Jerusalem; which was a figure of the Jerusalem that is above. The mountain of the Lord, and the house of the God of Jacob, must be explained here, as we have already observed from the 2d verse, in a figurative sense; denoting the church of the Living God, under the present dispensation of his grace, on which he commands his blessing, even life for evermore. The expression before us, in its spiritual signification, is instructive and animating, and merits the closest attention. It supposes, that the persons introduced speaking, and those complying

plying with their invitation, were to rise from a lower to a higher condition, which, you know, is commonly attended with much difficulty, and requires the most vigorous exertion. Though, at first view, the work, to which men are here encouraged, might appear unpleasant and difficult, yet the happy consequences arising from its performance, would abundantly compensate all their labour and trouble. Many have been the people who (as here foretold) have animated one another in their ascent to the house of the Lord. This doubtless would be the pleasant employment of the devout men, of every nation under heaven, who resorted to Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus Christ, when this prediction was remarkably verified.—This day, brethren, let this scripture be farther fulfilled in our ears. Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. I do not invite you to go up to the literal mount Zion, whither the tribes of God resorted of old, to give thanks to the name of the Lord; nor do I ask you to go up to the temple built on that mountain, called the house of God, which was long ago buried in ruins: I invite you to rise above this earth, in affection and pursuit, that, in the way of obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ, you may ascend to the spiritual Zion, the perfection of beauty, the house of God, in which he delights for ever to reside. Let not the labours and difficulties that may attend this journey discourage you: look to Jesus Christ, lest at any time you be weary and faint in your minds; and cease not, until, having gone from strength to strength, you arrive before God, perfect in Zion.—To this the most ample encouragement is subjoined:

And he will teach us of his ways. The person here spoken of, is no other than the blessed God himself, the great Instructor of his church. Who teacheth like him? The benefit promised is of the highest importance. It relates not to literal or grammatical instruction,

struction, whereby persons learn to read the words before them, and to acquire the form of knowledge, though this also cometh from the Lord of hosts; but to that spiritual instruction which is conveyed by the illumination of the understanding, and demonstration of the Spirit, which makes known the things freely given us of God, and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. By the former of these, a child is taught to read; by the latter, a man acquires a good understanding, which enables him to know the meaning of what he reads, or hears, respecting divine subjects. By the one, a speculative acquaintance with sacred truths is acquired; by the other, the law of God is put into the heart, and so written on the inward parts as to be transcribed into the life. The word of God shews us what is good, and what the Lord requires of us; and the Spirit of God effectually disposes the heart to attend to his instructions, to profit by them, so as to reduce them to practice; and both the word, and Spirit of God, being necessary to bring men to walk in the paths of the Lord, we suppose, both are included in the words before us.

By the ways of God, may be meant his purposes and counsels, so far as are proper and necessary for his servants to be acquainted with, in order to promote their happiness and salvation; his providential dispensations, so far as is consistent with their duty and interest to know them, that they may understand the loving-kindness of the Lord; the ministration of his Spirit, and the way of salvation, by which the manifold wisdom of Jehovah is admirably displayed. These are, with great propriety, called the ways of God, as he points them out to us in his word, and as they are intended to conduct to the enjoyment of him in the land of everlasting uprightness. Some degree of acquaintance with these things is indispensably requisite to mens walking in the ways of God's precepts; and, therefore, let us entreat, that he may grant us the wisdom of the prudent, that we

may

may understand his way, and walk therein with increasing delight. And let it be our great design, in attending his ordinances, that we may learn his truths; that we may hear all things commanded us in his law and gospel, respecting faith and practice, that, through the strength of the Most High, we may keep his precepts with our whole hearts.

And we will walk in his paths. This is the promised, happy effect of being instructed in the ways of God. By the paths of the Lord, we understand the divine doctrines, and holy precepts of the gospel, by which God hath marked the way wherein we ought to go, to the everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory. These paths serve to conduct to the kingdom of God all those who are so wise as walk in them. They afford direction in every condition through which they pass, whether prosperous or adverse; in every stage of life, whether youth or old age; in every relation in which they stand connected; and in every station, whether more humble or elevated, that they occupy. They clearly point out the truths necessary to be believed with the heart, and confessed with the mouth; and the duties requisite to be performed, to demonstrate the sincerity of faith, to adorn the profession of the gospel, and display the power of godliness.—The resolution before us plainly implies, a free choice of the precepts of the gospel, in preference to all other ways, and in opposition to every kind of compulsion whatsoever. It includes, a fixed purpose of heart, a firm determination, to cleave unto the Lord, notwithstanding every difficulty and discouragement that may lie in the way. And as walking is an uniform, progressive motion, it comprehends a constant, persevering progress in the good ways of the Lord, wherein they are instructed. Those who are taught of God, by his word, providence, and Spirit, here express their sincere purpose, through divine aid, to make advances in the paths of obedience and submission, to whatsoever the Most High may be pleased

pleased to require and appoint.—After what I have already remarked, respecting the fulfilment of this prophecy, I only add, that the words now explained received their accomplishment, when multitudes from among many great and celebrated nations, Greeks, Egyptians, and Italians, leaving their native country, resorted to the church of Jesus Christ in Mount Zion, where they were instructed in its doctrine, worship, and discipline, and joined in the faith and obedience of the gospel.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. These words assign the reason why great numbers of people should encourage one another to repair to Mount Zion. The law, and word of the Lord, seem both intended to signify, the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, published by Jesus Christ and his apostles. With great propriety are they called a law, as they bear the impression of the divine authority by which they were delivered, and reveal the will of the one great Lawgiver to all those to whom they are published. With the belief and subjection they justly demand, are connected glory, honour, and immortality, whilst the neglect and contempt of them exposes to tribulation and wrath. And they are properly called the law, by way of eminence, as far excelling all other laws. They are emphatically denominated the law of faith, the royal law, the perfect law of liberty.—With no less justice are they said to be the word of the Lord, as they proceeded from the great Messiah, who is Lord of all, the blessed Messenger, sent by the Living God to make known his will unto men. Accordingly, in the New Testament, they are described as the word of God's grace, the word of righteousness, the word of truth, the word of life, the word that is able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.—This law, and word of the Lord, is foretold to go forth out of Zion and Jerusalem. The expression seems to allude to the custom of princes, whose edicts and laws are issued

issued from the cities and palaces in which they reside, and being stamped with royal authority, they demand reverence and obedience. From the renowned places here mentioned, the sublime doctrine of the gospel was announced, according to this prediction. From thence Jesus Christ and his apostles, and afterward many others, went forth every where through the whole world, preaching the gospel with admirable simplicity and success; infomuch that, as the evangelist Luke affirms, repentance and remission of sins were preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The prophet Micah repeated this prophecy with little variation*. You may compare together both predictions at your leisure.—Let us, my friends, attend to this law, and hearken to this word of Jehovah, solicitous that from the heart we may believe and obey it; remembering, that ‘ he who despised Moses law, ‘ died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: ‘ of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he ‘ be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the ‘ Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the cove- ‘ nant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, ‘ and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace †?’

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

The happy consequences of the preaching of the gospel are, in this verse, beautifully described.—The person spoken of can be no other than the Lord, whose word went forth from Jerusalem, and who, in these last days, published in person the glad tidings of salvation. He is the Governor

* Micah i. 1.—4.

† Heb. x. 28, 29.

among the nations, for the kingdom is the Lord's. It belongs to kings, who are the judges of their people, to give laws to their subjects, to take care of their interests, to defend them from their enemies, to hear their petitions, to determine their differences, to go forth before them to war, and to distribute among them rewards and punishments. All these kind offices Jesus Christ the Lord performs, by his servants, his word, and Spirit, in his church and kingdom, constituted of the nations of them that are saved. He gives laws to his people: he adjusts all their concerns: he protects them from their powerful enemies: he attends to all their requests: he enriches them with every needful blessing: he decides their controversies: he goes before them to victory, as their leader: he dispenses among them those divine consolations, and necessary chastisements, which their various circumstances require: he invests his numerous subjects with the most glorious privileges; and admits them to the enjoyment of those sacred prerogatives, which render them safe and comfortable; though, for wise reasons, he defers their advancement to desired happiness, until their entrance into life, and the commencement of another œconomy. All power in heaven and earth being committed into his hands, as the great Judge of the world, he will at last determine the everlasting state of all men, who shall receive from him their final sentence.—Let us then, brethren, subject ourselves, without reserve, to our rightful Judge, Lawgiver, and King, and yield him that unlimited submission which he justly demands, assured, that he will deal with us as with his servant David, whom ‘ he rewarded according to his righteousness, and recompensed according to the cleanness of his hands *.’

And shall rebuke many people; by the sharp reproofs contained in his word, by various afflictive dispensations of his providence, by speaking to them in his

* Psal. xviii. 20.

wrath, and vexing them in his hot displeasure, on account of their unreasonable opposition to himself, his government, and church. Such rebuke the Lord, whose word went forth out of Jerusalem, hath often dispensed in the course of his righteous administration; and most remarkably, in that awful period in which he overthrew the city and temple of Jerusalem, rejected his highly favoured people, and delivered them into the hands of their enemies.—It may not be improper to remark, that the word translated *rebuke*, signifies also *to reprove* or *convince*. In this sense the same mighty Lord verifies this prediction, by convincing multitudes of their dangerous errors, their manifold wanderings, their gross infidelity, and innumerable transgressions, and consequently of their absolute need of deliverance from the wrath to come. He then successfully invites them to the participation of the most glorious privileges, and powerfully constrains them to love and obey the truth. This conviction is produced not by external force or violence, but is purely the effect of divine truth, accompanied with power, and the demonstration of the Spirit, whose office is to convince of sin, righteousness, and judgment.—Whilst then we endeavour, by manifestation of the truth, to commend ourselves to every man's conscience, lay your minds open to receive that conviction of your sin, and your duty, which we aim to reach to your hearts, in order to promote your best interests.

And they shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. The happy consequences of the benign influence of the gospel of Christ, are here described in beautiful, figurative language, which, I apprehend, it is unnecessary minutely to explain. The meaning of the various expressions seems to be simply this: The nations who embrace the doctrine of Jesus Christ, laying aside their former hatred, animosities, and differences,

differences, and the hostile weapons whereby these were supported, shall cultivate among themselves friendship, hospitality, and brotherly kindness, with all the blessed arts of peace, until, united in the bonds of love, they become one great body, one happy society. The Jew and the Greek, the Barbarian and the Scythian, the Egyptian and the Assyrian, having become the disciples of Christ, shall be divested of the secret grudges they entertained against one another; and, joined together in sincere affection, shall unite in celebrating the grace of God, and performing the duties of mutual love. Convinced that the kingdom of Messiah, which consisteth in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, is not advanced by the study of war, but by the cultivation of peace, they shall maintain among themselves the most agreeable harmony, and vanquish their adversaries by an invincible patience. Instructed by their divine Master, the Prince of peace, renewed by his spirit of love, and holding the same faith, so far as they are known to each other, they shall live together in peace; and far from fomenting differences, or exciting others to take up arms against their persecutors, they shall follow peace with all men, possessing the amiable character of blessed peace-makers. In this manner Christians act, according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who dwelleth in them: they practise his salutary direction, of having peace among themselves: they preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; and demonstrate to the world, that they are taught of God to love one another.

This prediction, which describes the peaceable disposition of the subjects of Messiah's kingdom, must be explained, like many others, with some restrictions; for the prophets, who often speak hyperbolically, as if they meant to be understood without limitation, must not, however, be so strictly interpreted, as to lead men to expect events that God doth not mean shall actually happen. It relates solely to the genuine

genuine disciples of Christ, who are the real subjects of his kingdom; and not to princes, and their subjects, professing Christianity, who often make war on one another, and on all who invade their rights and privileges. It does not exclude those disputes and controversies which may arise among Christians on religious matters; but simply represents the humble, meek, and peaceable dispositions with which they should be animated in their conduct toward one another. They shall not stir up strife, nor disturb, nor hurt one another; but, by the exercises of justice, kindness, and beneficence, each shall aim to advance the happiness of all.—This prophecy was accomplished, in some measure, in the first ages of Christianity, when the followers of the Lamb were of one heart and one soul: it has been farther fulfilled in after-times, when the power of the gospel has been experienced; and it shall receive its full completion in future happy days, when the doctrine of Jesus Christ, attended with the Holy Spirit, shall display its efficacy and glory in the hearts and lives of Christians.—In the mean time, let us remember the great design of God in our vocation, who hath called us unto peace. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with one may edify another*.

5 O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.

The prophet, by thus addressing his countrymen, endeavours to rouse them from their indolence, to recall them from their ignorance and errors, and to excite them to activity in the good ways of the Lord. By the house of Jacob might be intended the men of Judah, in distinction from the house of Israel; or we may suppose it comprehended the whole posterity of

* Rom. xiv. 19.

Israel, to whom Iſaiah delivered this prophecy. This designation might remind them, that as their great progenitor had the name of Jacob given him, becauſe he dealt deceitfully, and ſupplanted his brother, in like manner they had dealt deceitfully in the worſhip and ſervice of God.—The prophet incites them to join with him in the important buſineſs which he propoſes; Come ye, let us walk in the light of the Lord. In this manner the children of Iſrael, and the children of Judah, are repreſented, animating one another ‘to ſeek the Lord their God; Come,’ ſaid they, ‘let us join ourſelves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that ſhall not be forgotten *.’ The upright ſervants of the Moſt High always wiſh to travel the road to Zion in company. True godlineſs never contracts, but always enlarges the heart, with a generous concern for the glory of God, and the beſt intereſts of men.

Let us walk in the light of the Lord. Light being the moſt excellent of all viſible things, it is uſed in ſcripture to expreſs perfection in general, or ſome particular excellence. As it is the medium by which we contemplate and become acquainted with the creatures, it is a proper emblem of wiſdom and knowledge. In this ſenſe it muſt be underſtood, where Belſhazzar informed the prophet Daniel, that ‘I have heard of thee, that the ſpirit of the gods is in thee, and light and underſtanding, and excellent wiſdom is found in thee †.’ As it is the means of enabling us to regulate our conduct, and to direct our actions aright, it is uſed to denote holineſs and purity; and, in this view, thoſe ‘who are light in the Lord, are invited to walk as children of light ‡.’ As it gives pleaſure and joy to behold the light, it is thence employed to ſignify the moſt deſirable felicity and bleſſedneſs. Thus it is affirmed, that if any ſay, ‘I have ſinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profiteth me not; he will deliver his ſoul from

* Jer. l. 4, 5.

† Dan. v. 14.

‡ Eph. v. 8.

‘going

‘going down to the pit, and his life shall see the light*.’ The word of God, which communicates the most important knowledge, affords useful direction in every circumstance, and conveys substantial consolation to the heart under every trouble, may be called, with great propriety, the light of the Lord. Under this description the royal psalmist speaks of it, ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path †.’ It is the light of the Lord, as it proceeds from the Father of lights: it reveals his name; it discovers his blessed will, and points out the way which conducts to his kingdom and glory. The word of God then may be considered as the light of the Lord here intended, in which the prophet encourages others to walk with him.—Walking, you know, is the regular progressive motion which is made in moving from one place to another; and is often used in scripture, in a figurative sense, to express the whole course of mens conduct, and their progress in that course. To walk in darkness, is to live in ignorance, sin, and misery; and to walk in the light, is to practise truth, holiness, and righteousness. The import of the friendly invitation before us, seems to be shortly this: O house of Jacob, come, let us study a growing acquaintance with the word of God, solicitous to possess the knowledge it imparts, to enjoy the direction it affords, and the consolation it never fails to administer, when accompanied with the powerful blessing of its divine Author.—After this instructive example, let us animate each other to the practice of duty, exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the awful day approaching, which will resemble that foretold in the following part of this chapter. From mutual love and compassion, in obedience to the will of God, let us encourage each other to make progress in the good ways of the Lord, by those interesting considerations

* Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

† Psal. cxix. 105.

suggested in scripture, which are admirably adapted through the divine blessing, to promote this valuable purpose.

6 ¶ Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and *are* soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

The prophet here enters on a new subject, in which he gives an affecting description of the state of the Jewish nation at the time this prophecy was delivered. He addresses himself to God in the form of complaint, bewailing the lamentable condition of those whom he had forsaken, and pointing out the causes which had contributed to reduce them to such calamitous circumstances. Among these, were, their introduction of foreign customs, their pride, their love of worldly grandeur, their idolatry, and worship of strange gods, mentioned in this, and the three following verses.

The house of Jacob is here honoured with the character of the people of God. It justly belonged to them, not only as he created and formed them into a people, and governed them in right of his universal dominion; but they were his in a special manner, in consequence of his choosing them for his peculiar people, his redeeming them with a strong hand and stretched-out arm, his entering into covenant with them; so that they became his property, were called by his name, and professedly devoted to his service.—Notwithstanding this intimate connection, God had forsaken them. He took off the restraining influence of his providence, whereby he prevented their enemies from executing their destruction: he removed the hedge of his kind protection, by which they enjoyed the most agreeable safety. He withheld from them his gracious direction, which had attended them in all their fortunes: they saw not their signs;
there

there was no more any prophet, neither was there among them any that knew how long. The Most High hid counsel from them, so that they groped at noon-day. He withdrew from them his divine favour, which had long compassed them as a shield: he denied them his gracious presence, and Holy Spirit, which was the beauty and glory of their assemblies, having in reserve for them the most awful temporal calamities. This desertion is spoken of as having already taken place, which, in the Hebrew style, denotes, that it should certainly soon happen, and therefore might be considered as already having taken effect.—Hath God then cast away his people? God forbid! God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew. When offended with their multiplied and aggravated transgressions, he severely chastises, and grievously afflicts them, so that he may seem to forsake them; but, according to his own assurance, he will not altogether cast them out of his sight, nor finally reject them: ‘The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance*.’

Because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. This sentence, as Dr. Lowth observes, is manifestly imperfect: he thinks the true reading is, “They are filled with divination from the east.” The Gentile nations, prompted by a curiosity natural to mankind, were extremely fond of acquiring the knowledge of secret and future events. For this purpose they had among them persons who were called diviners, magicians, forcerers, all of whom, it seems, had the name of soothsayers. These pretended to discover things secret, and to foretel things future, by contemplating the heavens, by looking at the planets, by observing the flight of birds, by examining the entrails of beasts, by consulting with familiar spirits, and various other ceremo-

* Plal. xciv. 14.

nies. The nations which dwelt to the eastward of Canaan, and especially the Philistines, were remarkably addicted to this hurtful science. Hence we read, ‘ That when the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines, they called for the priests and diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the Lord? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place *.’ The curious arts used by these classes of men, were strictly prohibited by the law of God, under the severest penalties; and that the Israelites might have no excuse for complying with this detestable superstition, God assured them of the continuance of the spirit of prophecy among them. Notwithstanding, so very corrupt had that people become, that they had adopted the wicked practices, and forbidden customs of the Heathen nations around them, and particularly the necromancy and magic practised by the Philistines; and at the time this prophecy was delivered (probably in the reign of Uzziah), they were greatly addicted to soothsaying.—Besides, they abounded with the children of strangers, with whom they were highly pleased. They had joined themselves in marriage to strangers, from whom there arose among them a spurious breed of children, who could not properly be called the stock of Israel. This was another forbidden practice which was now frequent among them, intimately connected with the former, on account of both which God had forsaken them.—Have not we, my brethren, like Judah of old, introduced among us not only those evil manners which are peculiar to us as a people? but have not we also imported from foreign countries the most scandalous vices, which may justly provoke God to forsake us, as he forsook the Jewish nation? Let us then hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously. Let us earnestly deprecate that wrath to which we have exposed ourselves by our transgressions, and abandon

* 1 Sam. vi.

those corrupt practices whereby we have provoked the Lord to anger.

7 Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither *is there any* end of their treasures: their land is also full of horses, neither *is there any* end of their chariots.

Avarice, trust in riches, in human grandeur, and power, are mentioned as farther reasons why God had forsaken the men of Judah.—These things were done in direct opposition to the command of God, who ordered, That the king, set over Israel, ‘ shall not multiply horses to himself—neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold *.’ King Solomon was the first who notoriously transgressed in these particulars: for we are told, That he made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones; that he had fourteen hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen: and Uzziah seems, in these instances, to have followed his bad example. His mighty men of valour had under their command an army of three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, that made war with mighty power †; and among these, it is probable, were a great number of horses and chariots. The sins here charged against the Jews, consisted not merely in their possessing large quantities of gold and silver, and great numbers of horses and chariots, though even these were contrary to the law of God; but chiefly in this, that they pursued these things with the greatest keanness and avidity; that they used them to gratify their pride and vanity, and confided in them as their defence and glory. Though the God of their fathers had graciously promised, that if they cleaved unto him, and served him, he would prove their protector and portion, they wickedly departed from him, as if he had been insufficient for their felicity: they enlarged their

* Deut. xvii. 16, 17.

† 2 Chron. xxvi. 13.

covetous desires as hell; and of their ambition, to increase their treasures, there was no bounds. Not only their kings and princes, but those also who occupied inferior stations, committed these crimes to such an enormous degree, that, to use the words before us, there was no end of them.—‘ Lay
 ‘ not up then for yourselves treasures upon earth,
 ‘ where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where
 ‘ thieves break through and steal. But lay up for
 ‘ yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth
 ‘ nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not
 ‘ break through nor steal. For where your treasure
 ‘ is, there will your heart be also *.’ And whilst we hear that in the land of Judah horses and chariots were so multiplied, and relied upon, that God was thereby provoked to forsake his people, let us beware of their sin and folly, remember the name of the Lord our God, and stand upright.

§ Their land also is full of idols: they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.

This verse describes another aggravated transgression, on account of which God forsook the men of Judah.—The detestable crime here complained of, is idolatry, which properly consists in giving that honour and worship to the creature, which is due to God alone. Than this no practice can be more unreasonable and abominable. What can be more absurd than that men, who are the workmanship of God, should foolishly imagine, that they can make a god? that creatures endued with sense and reason, should expect assistance from that which can neither hear, nor see, nor speak, nor act, and which they can destroy at their pleasure? What more inconsistent than for people professing to believe in the true God, to fall down, and

* Matth. vi. 19, 20, 21.

worship the work of their own hands? Though it does not appear from sacred history, that idolatry was publicly encouraged or countenanced in Judah in the reign of Uzziah, when we suppose the prophetic discourse before us was delivered, we are informed, ‘ That the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed, and burnt incense still on the high places *.’ The idols then, of which the land was full, seem to have been household-gods, or tutelar deities, such as Rachel carried with her when she left her father’s family, and such as the man Micah had in his house, which were not reckoned inconsistent with the worship of the one living and true God. These were formed after different similitudes, of wood, or stone, or metal; and being overlaid with silver and gold, and placed in their houses, were considered as the arbiters of their fortune, and the authors of their prosperity; and, therefore, those honours were paid to them which belong to God only. Against this aggravated sin the Most High hath testified the greatest displeasure, in the declarations of his word, and the dispensations of his providence. On this account, Jeroboam, and his house, were cut off; Ahab, and his family, were extirpated; and Judah was forsaken of his God.— Let us then keep ourselves from idols; remembering, that every creature that is loved and served more than the Creator, occupies the room he ought always to possess, and exposes to his just displeasure.

9 And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.

With some interpreters, we may consider what is here said as connected with the preceding verses, and farther descriptive of the sin of Judah; or, with others, as introductory to the awful judgments de-

* 2 Kings xv. 4.

nounced in the following verses. In the first sense, the words represent the prevailing idolatry which had insinuated itself among all ranks of the Israelitish people, high and low, great and small. The mean man, who was in low circumstances, and occupied an inferior station, though he should have reckoned himself by far too great to bow down to a dead idol, shamefully degraded the dignity of his nature, and grievously offended his Maker, by prostrating himself before the works of his own hands. The great man also, who was exalted to distinguished rank, and enjoyed the most elevated station, discovered the meanness of his spirit, and the depravity of his heart, by falling down before the image which his own fingers had framed, or which he had ordered others to make for him. In this view, we behold with astonishment, men, originally made after the similitude of God, though strictly prohibited, under the severest penalties, to bow down to any idol, preferring the creature to the great Creator, who hath connected the most precious blessings with his service.—According to the latter interpretation, the words describe the terrible judgment which Almighty God was about to inflict on Judah, on account of their divination, avarice, and idolatry. In this sense, the similar expressions, used Chap. v. 15. must be understood, where this prediction is repeated; ‘And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.’ In proof that this is the true meaning of the prophet, it may not be improper to observe, that the Hebrew word translated *humble*, is not used to signify such a bowing of the body as is made in worshipping idols, but denotes such a humiliation as arises from the unavoidable influence of external causes. Taking the words in this sense, they contain a general proposition, in which God threatens the idolatrous people of Judah with his dreadful vengeance, until they were greatly depressed by various calamities. From either

either sense of the expression, we learn this important lesson, That when corruption becomes general, and pervades all ranks, awful judgments shall be of equal extent with the sins which procured them.

Therefore forgive them not. I cannot think that our prophet is here imprecating divine vengeance on his countrymen, to whom he was sent with the message before us, which might have induced them to conclude, that he possessed an uncharitable, vindictive spirit. All that is meant, I suppose, is a solemn ratification of the just judgments of the Almighty, denounced against his impenitent, professing people, like what is ascribed to blessed spirits in heaven, who are introduced, ‘Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great, and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth*.’ Or we may get rid of the difficulty in the expression, by changing the imperative for the future tense, which the Hebrew language justly admits; and read, instead of *forgive them not*, ‘Therefore thou (O Lord) wilt not forgive them.’ This passage hath no more difficulty in it than the other predictions of divine vengeance in the sacred writings, intended to warn and alarm sinners, to lead them to repentance, and induce them to flee from the wrath to come. The import then of this short address to God will be, ‘Because the men of Judah have grievously transgressed against thee, and obstinately persisted in their sins, thou wilt not pardon their iniquities, nor remit the punishment which they have richly deserved; but wilt give them to ex-

* Rev. xi. 17, 18.

perience what an evil thing, and bitter, it is, that they have forsaken the Lord their God. As Mr. Henry justly observes, This prediction refers not to particular persons, many of whom repented, and were pardoned, but to the body of the nation, against whom an irreversibile doom was passed.—Let us then carefully shun those aggravated sins, which certainly expose to the awful judgments of heaven, and provoke God to execute that dreadful vengeance, which even his great mercy will not avert.

10 ¶ Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty.

In this verse the prophet gives good counsel to those who were guilty of the sins he had mentioned.—As the people, to whom this advice was delivered, could not have complied with it in its strictest sense, it is necessary to understand it not in the literal, but in the figurative and spiritual signification; which requires to be carefully investigated, that we may discern its true meaning. There seems to be an obvious reference to two memorable transactions, the one recorded in the history of Moses, and the other in that of Elijah, when the Lord God was about to afford these eminent men awful displays of his divine glory, and terrible majesty. ‘Behold (said the Lord to his servant Moses), there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock; and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by.*’ That part of the history of Elijah to which I refer, you will find in 1 Kings xix. 11. and following verses. In allusion to these great events, Isaiah directs his countrymen to enter into the rock, and to hide them in the dust. The rock in Horeb,

* Exod. xxxiii. 21, 22.

on which Moses stood, and from which he brought water for the Israelites, we are assured, by an inspired writer, was a remarkable type of Jesus Christ. Like the rock, he was without external form or comeliness; of distinguished eminence, being higher than the kings of the earth, and the angels in heaven; of immoveable stability, for the support of his people; and affording the most agreeable shelter and safety from the wrath and judgments of God. This is the spiritual rock into which our prophet invites the house of Jacob to enter, and to have immediate recourse, that therein they might find refuge from approaching calamities, and a shelter from the tempest of divine wrath. Nor can we suppose this sense of the direction before us could appear surprising or strange, to a people who were taught frequently to celebrate the praises of Jehovah in the following language: ‘The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower *.’

Hide thee in the dust. Dust, you know, in the proper sense of the word, is light, small, crumbled earth. In times of deep humiliation, to signify their penitence and sorrow, the Jews were accustomed to sprinkle it upon their heads, or to lie down in the dust itself, of which many instances occur in scripture. When Israel turned their backs before their enemies, Joshua, and the elders of Israel, put dust on their heads †. After upright Job had heard and seen much of the glory of God, he repented in dust and ashes ‡: he either threw himself down in the dust, or cast the dust and ashes upon his head, which was considered as a proper expression of deep and solemn repentance. Various were the symbols anciently used by the penitents, who mourned for their sins: they laid aside the ornaments of dress; they put on sackcloth; they

* Psal. xviii. 2.

† Josh. vii. 6.

‡ Job xlii. 6.

rent their garments; they bowed down the head like a bulrush; they smote upon the thigh, and upon the breast; they sat or hid themselves in the dust. When God, therefore, calls his people to hide themselves in the dust, he invites them to the exercise of true repentance, of which this humiliating posture exhibited a proper emblem; and in this manner they were to discover the reality and pungency of their sorrow for sin, and their fear of God's righteous judgments. Persons hide themselves, when they are afraid to appear openly on account of their misconduct, or when they are anxious to enjoy safety from threatened dangers. The advice then, under consideration, served to remind the people of Judah of their sin and danger, and the absolute necessity of thorough repentance, accompanied with suitable proofs of its truth and power, would they escape the divine vengeance.—These are, indeed, the best advices that can possibly be given to sinners, of every description; nothing being more necessary to our safety and happiness, than fleeing to Jesus Christ, the rock of defence, and covert from the storm; and no exercise more becoming, than prostrating ourselves before God, in deep humiliation and self-abasement, on account of all our abominations. To the immediate, faithful performance of these important duties you are now earnestly invited, by him who calls the things that are not as though they were: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest *.' 'In returning, and rest, shall ye be saved.'

For fear of the Lord, and the glory of his majesty. What is here suggested, is intended to enforce the practice of the preceding advices. 'Behold, God is great, and we know him not.—With God is terrible majesty. The Almighty we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice.—Men do therefore fear be-

* Matth. xi. 28.

‘ fore him *.’ Such was the sublime language of Elihu, when speaking of the eternal God. The Lord, and the glory of his majesty, are the proper objects of dread and reverence. The word translated *majesty*, is derived from one that signifies *to acknowledge or celebrate*: hence it is used to express majesty, greatness, or excellency, which require to be suitably acknowledged. The majesty of God comprehends all that is worthy to be honoured, extolled, and praised, by angels and men. Majesty originally belongs to God, and all the greatness of earthly potentates and princes are only streams flowing from that fountain. The glory of divine majesty consists in its high pre-eminence, and distinguished excellence, which infinitely surpasses every other grandeur, and is conspicuous in all the perfections of God. There is a glorious majesty in the wisdom, power, and justice of Jehovah; yea, in his goodness, love, and faithfulness: indeed, his word, his works, and particularly his judgments, are truly majestic and awful; for he is terrible in his doings to the children of men, and terrible even to the kings of the earth.—This glorious majesty of Jehovah, which is most dreadful and tremendous, all men, and especially notorious sinners, ought to fear. The fear of the Lord here meant, is that holy, reverential awe of the Most High, which ought at all times to possess our minds, and regulate our conduct, in every circumstance, under the various dispensations of providence. Of this a striking instance is exhibited, in the man according to God’s own heart, who acknowledges, ‘ My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments †.’ This becoming disposition, exercised under awful displays of divine glory, in the execution of righteous judgments, excites to solicitude for safety from deserved calamities, and disposes carefully to avoid whatever is offensive to God, and ex-

* See Job xxxvi. xxxvii.

† Psal. cxix. 120.

poses to his dread displeasure. Sensible we are guilty creatures, justly meriting punishment, it awakens humility and gratitude, it renders importunate in prayer, and makes cautious and circumspect in conduct. Convinced that, if we retain our pride, indulge in covetousness, luxury, profanity, and other iniquities, our judgments shall be increased, and our calamities multiplied, let us learn to fear the glorious majesty of God, to stand in awe, and not to sin.

11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

The prophet here foretels the certain effects of the dreadful judgments which God would assuredly inflict upon proud, incorrigible sinners, of every description. These he again repeats, at the 17th verse, in almost the same words; so that when we have explained the verse before us, we shall have also illustrated the other.—Pride and haughtiness commonly expresseth itself by lofty looks, and seldom fails to discover its influence in the countenance. It consisteth in entertaining a high opinion of our real or supposed excellencies, in setting up ourselves in opposition to the authority of God, in slighting his mercies by ingratitude, in submitting to his dispensations with reluctance, in despising others, whilst we transfer to ourselves the honour of all we enjoy, and make our own pleasure and profit the chief objects of pursuit. It is discovered by affecting a pretended superiority above others at their expence, instead of esteeming them better than ourselves, and allowing them to praise us, and not our own mouths: it renders us partial in our own favours; and disposes to vain boasting, vain glory, ambition, and self-conceit. Indeed pride is such a radical, comprehensive evil, that it will hardly submit to the limits of a definition.

Ashamed

Ashamed of itself, on some pretence or other, it always assumes the mask of humility. If it blow the trumpet, it is that the poor may be relieved; if it put on gay attire, it is only for the sake of fashion; if it censure others, the subject is introduced by commendations; if it aim at higher station, it is under pretence that God, or men, may be served; and when it enters society, it assumes a supercilious behaviour, and discovers an eager anxiety to obtain applause, whilst it often artfully returns the commendations received, that they may be got with the greater advantage when they rebound. Thus, under the veil of humility, pride endeavours to impose upon God, and to deceive men; and therefore it is declared, that it

Shall be humbled, and bowed down. How short-lived, how unreasonable, how mischievous a thing is pride! Destitute of all foundation, it aims to support itself upon nothing. High birth, large estate, immense riches, extensive knowledge, the most distinguished gifts, and elevated station, cannot vindicate its high pretensions, or gratify its vast demands; and therefore it is maintained by an imaginary greatness and importance. Nor is it less mischievous than unreasonable. It hath proved the ruin of mankind; it hath divided the church; it hath separated intimate friends; it hath bred contention in superiors; it hath sown discord among brethren, and excited the contempt of inferiors. Now, as Solomon long ago observed, ‘A man’s pride shall bring him low*.’ God scattereth the proud in the imagination of their heart: they dream of an imaginary greatness, the aggrandizement of their families, the increase of their fortunes, the extent of their reputation, and the glory of their achievements. Walking in this vain shew, he, to whom a proud heart, and even a high look, are an abomination, ‘beholds every one that is proud, and

* Prov. xxix. 23.

‘ abases him: he looks upon every one that is lofty, ‘ and brings him low.’ He resisteth the proud. The word denotes, he sets himself as in battle-array against them, and sends forth his wrath among them: he treads down the wicked in their place; he hides them in the dust together; and, thus executing the judgment here foretold, he declares himself to be the Almighty God, to whom vengeance belongeth.—Beware then of pride and haughtiness, which commonly go before a fall, and expose to most awful judgments, many instructive instances of which are recorded in scripture. When the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was lifted up, he was deposed from his kingdom: when Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was hardened in pride, it proved his destruction, and that of his mighty host: when Herod, the king, was elated by vain applause, he was cut off by a shocking calamity: the king of Tyre, whose heart was lifted up, was cast to the ground; and on account of the pride and lofty looks of the men of Judah, they were brought low. Let us then hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. The word translated *exalt*, signifies to elevate to an inaccessible height, and so to establish in an exalted state, as that no power whatever can molest or bring low. It is therefore, with peculiar propriety, applied to express the high exaltation of Jehovah. The glorious displays which are given of the perfections of God, in abasing the proud, shall make them know, that, wherein they deal proudly, Jehovah is far above them; and shall excite men, of every description, highly to extol the name, the glory, and the works of the Almighty. Indeed, there is not any work of God which tends more to his honour and exaltation, than humbling the proud, and exalting the lowly; and in this he seems to take peculiar pleasure. Hence our blessed Saviour’s maxim, ‘ Whosoever exalteth ‘ himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth ‘ himself,

‘ himself, shall be exalted *.’ Accordingly it is foretold, that when God doth this, people shall magnify and extol him, by entertaining elevated apprehensions of his infinite majesty, and exercising suitable affections toward him, fearing him who pours contempt upon princes, trusting in him in whom is everlasting strength, and loving him in whose favour there is life. They shall also exalt the Lord, by celebrating the praises of his divine excellencies with gratitude and joy, and by such a conduct as may give the most sensible and lively representation of God; beginning, carrying on, and ending all their businesses in him; making his love the principle, his law the rule, and his glory the end of all their actions. The season marked out for the accomplishment of this event, is *that day*, wherein Jehovah, by terrible judgments, shall bring down the pride of haughty men, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.—‘ Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth; that thy beloved may be delivered: save with thy right hand, and answer me †.

12 For the day of the Lord of hosts *shall be* upon every *one that is* proud and lofty, and upon every *one that is* lifted up, and he shall be brought low.

In this, and the four following verses, the awful judgments threatened in the preceding verse, are more clearly explained, with respect to the objects on whom they were to be inflicted.—The day of the Lord of hosts denotes, that solemn season wherein he would appear in terrible majesty, effectually humbling the pride of haughty sinners. The time fixed for this purpose is called a day, because God was then to be gloriously exalted, his power and righteousness conspi-

* Luke xiv. 11.

† Psal. cviii. 5, 6.

cuously displayed, his justice in inflicting predicted calamities acknowledged, which was to be followed by the dismal darkness of night. Such a season is emphatically described in scripture, as the day of the Lord's anger*, a day of calamity and visitation †, and the day of the Lord's vengeance ‡. To render the description more terrible, it is said to be the day of the Lord of hosts. All the creatures in the universe are the hosts or armies of Jehovah : angels, who excel in strength ; the sun, the moon, and the stars ; the thunder, and the lightning ; the wind, the hail, and the rain ; the storm, and the tempest ; the most insignificant insects, such as the flies, and the caterpillars ; yea, the sand of the sea, and the dust of the earth. These are the mighty hosts of God : they are subject to his command : they exactly obey his orders, and execute his pleasure. Earthly princes have their armies, to protect their persons, to defend their subjects, to secure their dominions ; they have to assist their allies, and to establish their authority ; so that all their power is derived from others. Whereas the Lord of hosts is perfectly independent of all his armies, who derive all their power from him ; and though he is pleased to employ them to effectuate his purposes, he is their strength, and their defence. How dreadful then, beyond description, must be the day of the Lord of hosts, whose armies, and instruments of destruction, are as numerous as the angels of God, the stars of heaven, the men in the world, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the sand of the sea ! This is the day here foretold, which

Shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low. It is not said, that the day of the Lord shall be upon the mean, the poor, and the weak, but upon every one that is lifted up, from whatever cause his elevation may proceed. Is it personal strength, vi-

* Lam. ii. 22.

† Jer. xlvi. 21.

‡ Jer. xlvi. 10.

gour, and firmness of constitution, with which he is elated? Though he be among the sons of the mighty, strong as the children of Anak, the weakness of God is stronger than men; before the Almighty, he is only as a grasshopper, and is easily crushed as the moth. Is it courage and fortitude, which hath rendered him valiant, and made his heart as the heart of a lion? He who saith to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, can quickly deprive him of his courage, and render him timorous and faint-hearted, so as to tremble at the shaking of a leaf. Is it riches and wealth, which are reckoned a strong tower, a defence, and the sinews of strength? The day of the Lord shall blow upon them, and they shall pass away as the flower of the field, or an eagle flying toward heaven. Is it honour and renown, that hath lift him up to the pinnacle of earthly glory? God, who overthroweth the mighty, shall bring down all that dignity, on account of which he highly valued himself, and reduce him to the most humiliating condition.—History, sacred and profane, confirms the truth of this prediction, which hath been verified in numberless instances. Zedekiah, king of Judah, deprived of his royal dignity, of his sons, who were slain before his eyes, and then of his eye-sight, was bound in fetters of brass, and carried to Babylon. Bajazet, the emperor of Turkey, was bound with fetters of gold, by the victorious Tamerlane, and carried along with him in his march through Asia, in an iron cage, as an object of ridicule. Henry V. emperor of Germany, was reduced to such poverty, that he went to the great church which he himself had built at Spire, begging the place of a chorister, to keep him from starving. When the day of the Lord thus brings down the great and the lofty, let not mean men, who are proud and haughty, imagine they shall escape; but remember, that he who humbleth the princes of the earth, will not suffer the people to pass unpunished.—‘ Let us then praise, and honour, and extol
 ‘ the

‘ the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and
 ‘ his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he
 ‘ is able to abase *.’

13 And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, *that are high and lifted up*, and upon all the oaks of Bashan.

In this, and the three following verses, we have a striking instance of that peculiar way of writing, frequently used by the prophets, in which they exhibit things divine, spiritual, and moral, by images taken from things natural, artificial, and historical. Cedar-trees are remarkable for their great height, the almost incorruptibility and agreeable flavour of their timber; on these, and other accounts, they are called in scripture, goodly cedars, and cedars of God. Lebanon was a mountain in Canaan, famous for its beauty, height, and fruitfulness; and had its name probably from its white appearance, occasioned by the white frankincense which it produced, and the snow which continued to lie long on its summit. By the cedars of Lebanon, in the allegorical language of prophecy, are meant the kings and princes of Judah †, who were elevated to great dignity, who seemed to be established in perpetual authority, and afforded an agreeable shade of protection to their subjects.—The oak-tree, you know, is esteemed on account of the strength, the firmness, and durability of its wood, and the extensive spread of its branches. Bashan was a very fruitful country, situated beyond Jordan, of which Og, the giant, was once the king; and afterward it became part of the inheritance of the half tribe of Manasseh. It was remarkable for the fertility of its soil, the excellence of its cattle, the stateliness of its trees, and the gigantic stature of its inhabitants. The oaks of Bashan then, in a metapho-

* Dan. iv. 37.

† See 2 Chron. xxv. 18.

rical sense, denote the great and mighty kings, and princes of the highest rank, who were esteemed on account of their power and influence.

14 And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills *that are* lifted up.

The land of Canaan, possessed by the people to whom Isaiah delivered this prophecy, abounded with mountains and hills, which are repeatedly mentioned in the Bible; such as Hermon, Gilead, Tabor, and others. By the mountains and hills here intended, we may understand their inhabitants who possessed the higher and more inaccessible parts of the country, on whom divine judgments were to be executed for their sins, in the approaching awful day of the Lord, as well as on those who inhabited the lower grounds, which were more easily approached. Or rather, by the high mountains and lofty hills, are intended kingdoms, republics, states, and cities, which, like mountains, seem to be immoveably established, and elevated above others in the enjoyment of the most important advantages. The words, in their figurative sense, seem capable of either of these meanings; in both which they are used in other passages of scripture.

15 And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall.

There were a considerable number of towers in the land of Israel and Judah. Some of them were built for the benefit of shepherds, when looking after their flocks, and for watchmen, who were employed in keeping vineyards, that they might lodge there, and from thence have an opportunity of observing the approach of danger. These last are called the towers of the watchmen*. There were also high towers, in-

* 2 Kings xvii. 9.

tended as a kind of citadels or fortresses, commonly built on high grounds, for places of safety and defence in time of war and invasion. Of this sort was the tower of Peniel, and others; and, in allusion to the comfortable retreat enjoyed in these, the royal poet thus speaks with triumph, 'God is my high tower *.'—The fenced walls, next mentioned, were the walls built for defence around houses, cities, or fortresses, to secure them from the inroads of enemies, and the attacks of fraud and violence. These should prove utterly insufficient to afford shelter in the dreadful day of the Lord, when distress and calamity was to be universal. In the metaphorical sense of the expressions, we may understand them as signifying wise counsellors, able statesmen, and military officers, who are the guardians and protectors of their country.

16 And upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all the pleasant pictures.

Various are the opinions of interpreters respecting Tarshish, the recital of which might rather perplex than edify you; and therefore I shall not stay to mention them, and the arguments whereby they are supported. Some learned writers have agreed, that Tarshish is Tartessus, a city of Spain, situated at the mouth of the river Betis. This place was once a most celebrated mart, or trading city, frequented anciently by the Phenicians, who conveyed from thence silver and gold, with which it then abounded. It proved one principal source of wealth to Judea, and the neighbouring kingdoms. As the inhabitants enjoyed a very extensive and lucrative trade, they must have had at sea many large vessels, employed in carrying various articles of commerce. In the allegorical language of prophecy, works of art and invention may here be intended; or rather, the merchants enriched by com-

* Psa. xviii. 2.

merce, and abounding with the luxuries of life.—
And upon all pleasant pictures. When the Lord spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab, he commanded him to speak thus unto the children of Israel; ‘Ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places*.’ Notwithstanding this order from Heaven, they made themselves pleasant pictures, and images of various kinds, all of which were to share in the destruction of the day of the Lord. In their figurative sense, they may denote the beauties and elegancies which refined delicacy, and the cultivation of the different arts, had introduced; or rather, those who were most admired as persons of taste and discernment.—The prophet, having shewn, by an instructive variety of figurative expressions, that the judgments of God were to be very widely extended, even to all the proud and haughty, thought they might appear in their own view, and in that of their admirers, goodly as the cedars in Lebanon, strong as the oaks of Bashan, immoveable as the mountains, impregnable as high towers, encompassed with walls of defence, rich as the merchant ships, and beautiful as the finest pictures, proceeds to declare what should be the effects of the day of the Lord.—This subject instructs us, that neither dignity of station, eminence of place, human policy or power, can afford safety from divine judgments. Neither strength nor courage, horse nor bow, forts nor treasures, can exempt men from feeling the effects of God’s deserved displeasure. Though they hide themselves in Carmel, or in the bottom of the sea; though they dig down to hell, or climb up to heaven; though even their enemies shew them favour; the Almighty will find them out, and punish them for their transgressions. ‘Be wise now therefore, O ye kings:

* Numb. xxxiii. 52.

‘ be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the
 ‘ Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss
 ‘ the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the
 ‘ way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blef-
 ‘ sed are all they that put their trust in him *.’

17 And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

By the repetition of what was asserted in the 11th verse, the infallible certainty of divine judgments, and their extensive influence, is inculcated as a subject demanding most serious attention.—The day of the Lord, to which these predictions seem to refer, and in which, we suppose, they received their accomplishment, was the remarkable season wherein God executed terrible judgments by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, on the Jews, and neighbouring nations; which appears, from the prophetic writings, to have been a time in which the most grievous calamities were felt. According to the word of the Lord God of Israel, by the prophet Jeremiah, ‘ He took away
 ‘ the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the
 ‘ voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride,
 ‘ the sound of the millstones, and the light of the
 ‘ candle. And the whole land became a desolation,
 ‘ and an astonishment †.’ Thus said the Lord God, by the prophet Ezekiel, ‘ Howl ye, wo worth the
 ‘ day. For the day is near, even the day of the
 ‘ Lord is near, a cloudy day, it shall be the time of
 ‘ the heathen ‡.’ And Zephaniah, speaking of the severe judgments which were to be inflicted at the period referred to, gives the following affecting description: ‘ The great day of the Lord is near, it is
 ‘ near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the

* Psa. ii. 10, 11. † Jer. xxv. 10, 11. ‡ Ezek. xxx. 2, 3.
 . day

‘ day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness *.’—Then were remarkably fulfilled the several predictions we have been considering: the princes of the house of David, and many other kings, kingdoms, and states, were greatly distressed; fortified cities and towns were dismantled; counsellors, military officers, were greatly humbled; and the Jews lost the independence of their government.

18 And the idols he shall utterly abolish.

In the day of vengeance, God would totally extirpate the gods, who had not made the heaven and the earth.—The Jews were to be fully convinced of the folly and wickedness of that idolatry, to which, through many ages, they had been shamefully addicted, notwithstanding the reproofs they had frequently received: in consequence of which, they should treat their idols with the utmost contempt, exterminate them from their land, and return to the worship and service of the God of Abraham.—This prediction was remarkably verified at their return from captivity at Babylon, when they effectually renounced the service of strange gods, and were completely cured of their idolatrous practices. Though some of them might afterward fall into idolatry, yet the nation, as a nation, never returned to it any more.—Sensible that, by estrangement from God, we shall prove the instruments of our own misery, and bring on ourselves certain destruction, let us flee from idolatry, and keep ourselves from idols. Convinced that our true happiness consists in the favour of God, in communion with him, and the enjoyment of his approbation, let us throw down those idols we

* Zeph. i. 14. 15.

may have fet up in our hearts; faying, with a noble indignation, as Ephraim of old, ‘What have I any ‘ more to do with idols *?’

19 And they fhall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majeſty, when he ariſeth to ſhake terribly the earth.

This verſe deſcribes the terror and conſternation with which the houſe of Jacob ſhould be ſeized, when they beheld the majeſty of God diſplayed in the execution of the dreadful judgments already mentioned.—The prophet had directed them to the only proper expedient for obtaining ſafety from approaching danger; namely, to enter into the rock, and hide them in the duſt. Foreſeeing they would reject his counſel, he informs them of the mean ſhifts they ſhould take, when, through ſlaviſh fear, they would ſeek for refuge where it was not to be found. The land of Judea abounded with mountains and rocks, which the inhabitants improved as places of defence in time of war and danger, by cutting holes, and making caverns, into which they might retire from their enemies. Hence we read in the book of Judges, ‘That ‘ becauſe of the Midianites (into whoſe hands the ‘ Lord delivered them for ſeven years), the children ‘ of Iſrael made them the dens which are in the ‘ mountains, and caves, and ſtrong holds †.’ And in the hiſtory of David’s perſecution, under the government of Saul, we are informed, That in the wilderneſs of Engedi there was a cave ſo large, that David, and fix hundred men, hid themſelves in the ſides of it, whiſt Saul entered its mouth without perceiving them ‡. To theſe they had recourſe in times of danger, as we ſee, 1 Sam. xiii. 6. ‘When the men ‘ of Iſrael ſaw that they were in a ſtrait (for the people

* Hoſea xiv. 8.

† Judges xvi. 2.

‡ 1 Sam. xxiv.

‘ were

‘ were distressed), then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.’ From all which we learn, that to go into the holes of the rocks, and the caves of the earth, were the effects of consternation and dread, arising from the view of impending danger, with which the wicked, hypocritical, and profane should be seized, on beholding the bright displays of divine majesty and consummate righteousness, in the punishment of transgressors. Then should they seek for safety in the most abject manner, by the same inglorious methods they had tried in times of former public calamity. Such were the unsuccessful expedients to which sinners were to resort, in the season of approaching calamity.

When God ariseth to shake terribly the earth. God who hath made the earth by his power, and established the world by his wisdom, when he executes awful judgments upon impenitent transgressors, sometimes actually shakes the earth, and causes it to tremble; of which some remarkable instances are recorded in scripture. Whatever natural causes are assigned for this wonderful phenomenon, it certainly affords a stupendous display of almighty power. The words before us, I apprehend, must be understood in a figurative sense, which seems to be most suitable to the connection in which they stand. By the earth then is meant, empires, kingdoms, and states, formed by its inhabitants for establishing order and government, and promoting their common interests. And the shaking of these intimates, that, at the period referred to, the nations of the world should be violently agitated, and terrible commotions excited, by the threatened judgments of Heaven. A similar prediction is delivered by our prophet, when foretelling the destruction of Babylon by the Medes, which must in like manner be interpreted; ‘ Therefore I will shake
‘ the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her
‘ place in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the
‘ day

‘ day of his fierce anger *.’ As here foretold, it actually came to pass in the Jewish nation, and neighbouring kingdoms, when God, by means of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, made the earth as it were to quake. Such events may justly alarm the wicked, and fill them with consternation and dread; whilst the hearts of the righteous, trusting in the Lord, are established in the blessed prospect of that kingdom which cannot be shaken.

20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, *each one* for himself to worship, to the moles, and to the bats.

These words farther describe the terror that was to fill the minds of idolaters, at the time when God would avenge his injured majesty. At that period it should frequently happen, that a man addicted to idolatry, sensible of his folly and danger, would throw away the idols he had honoured, and in which he had trusted, with every symptom of contempt and abhorrence. Like a person once deprived of reason, but happily restored to the right use of it, who casts away the trifles with which he was formerly amused, he rejects with scorn and detestation those dead idols, which he reckons his disgrace, no less than his crime, that he had foolishly regarded. With determined purpose that he will never have any farther connection with them, however valuable the materials of which they were composed, he casts them to the moles, and to the bats: he throws them into obscure and dark places, such as are frequented by these creatures. Ashamed of the confidence he placed in them, and the worship he offered them, and convinced of their utter insufficiency to afford him the least security from evil, or to contribute to his safety and happiness,

* Isaiah xiii. 13.

he shall treat them as the most base and contemptible objects, unworthy of being again brought to view.— This, my brethren, represents to us what ought to be our conduct. Something beside God hath possessed that place in our hearts which ought to have been reserved for the living and true God; and that object, by whatsoever name it is distinguished, is properly an idol. Let us then reject with disdain all those idols which have usurped the throne of our hearts; and earnestly pray, that the God of the spirits of all flesh may effectually dispose and enable us to say, with Ephraim of old, ‘What have I to do any more with ‘idols?’ and to return with dutiful affection to the service and obedience of our highest Lord.

21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.

What was said in illustration of the 19th, may serve to explain this verse, the expressions being nearly the same. I only remark, on the repetition of the words, what Joseph said concerning Pharaoh’s dream being doubled, ‘It is because the thing is established ‘by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass*.’

22 Cease ye from man whose breath *is* in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

This very momentous admonition concludes this part of the prophetic discourse, and serves as an introduction to that which followeth.—The inference is just, and the advice is peculiarly seasonable. Since the pride of man shall be humbled, and those of the most elevated rank brought low, this consideration ought to call us off from depending on such a frail,

* Genes. xli. 32.

uncertain creature. You may be surpris'd when I tell you, that some Christian interpreters are of opinion, that the Man Christ Jesus is here intended; and that the Jews, to whom our prophet was sent, are admonish'd to beware of injuring and abusing him, when he should appear in the fashion of a man, and the form of a servant. Though I highly respect the names and abilities of these writers, I cannot agree with them in explaining this verse, as I perceive nothing said in it peculiar to the character of the Messiah.—Man is the object from which we are directed to cease. What is man? The scripture, by various humbling comparisons, represents, in a most affecting manner, the feebleness of our nature, and the meanness of our condition. To this inquiry God himself replies, ‘Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return.’ Our prophet answers, ‘All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass*.’ And the other inspired writers unite in giving similar descriptions of the frailty of man, whom they pronounce to be ‘altogether lighter than vanity †’, which hath no real existence: whom they liken to a shadow ‡, which quickly disappears; and to a worm §, for meanness of original, and liability to danger: yea, whole nations are counted before God as less than nothing, and vanity. Though the human body is the most curious workmanship, beautifully proportioned, and firmly connected; and the human mind, possessed of astonishing powers, is capable of being enriched with extensive knowledge, and amiable dispositions; yet all these may be suddenly impaired or destroyed.—From man, therefore, we are directed to cease. The word signifies, *to give over, to desist, or abstain from*. The expression is in-

* Isaiah xl. 6, 7.
† Job xxv. 6.

‡ Psal. lxxii. 9.

§ Job xiv. 2.

complete; and, to render the sense full, requires some word to be supplied. From the connection and design of the direction, we suppose its meaning to be fully expressed thus: Cease from depending upon, or trusting in man. Solomon delivers an excellent advice in his book of Proverbs, in the same manner as here: ‘Cease from thine own wisdom *;’ *i. e.* abstain from trusting and depending upon it. In the same sense of the word, we are required to refrain from trusting in man, however great, wise, or powerful he may be; and to desist from overvaluing ourselves on account of our connection with such men, or the interest we may have in their friendship. This dangerous practice, into which we are naturally apt to run, we are repeatedly cautioned against in the word of God; particularly by the royal psalmist: ‘Put not
 ‘ your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in
 ‘ whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth,
 ‘ he returneth to his earth. In that very day his
 ‘ thoughts perish †.’ Great men, you observe, are there especially mentioned, because we are most ready to idolize them.—Let us beware then of neglecting this necessary counsel, and exposing ourselves to the awful curse which God hath denounced against those who trust in man, and make flesh their arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord. ‘He shall be
 ‘ like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when
 ‘ good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places
 ‘ in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited ‡.’ Two motives are suggested in the following words, to enforce compliance with this friendly admonition.

Whose breath is in his nostrils. The life of man, resulting from the union of soul and body, is preserved by means of respiration or breathing. The breath, you know, is continually going out and coming in at the nostrils, situated at the extremity of the face; and at these doors, as we may call them, it is ever going

* Prov. xxiii. 4. † Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4 ‡ Jer. xvii. 6.

and returning like one ready to depart, whilst we are uncertain but every breath may be the last. This represents man to be altogether an improper object of trust and confidence.—Besides, he is a mean and inconsiderable creature; *for wherein is he to be accounted of.* Originally he was indeed of no small account, when made after the image of God, a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour, and invested with dominion over inferior creation. But by his apostacy from God, he is now become like the beasts that perish, exposed to death, in the most extensive and awful sense of the word. And notwithstanding the Almighty is graciously pleased, by his Son and Spirit, to repair the ruins of the apostacy, with respect to multitudes, yet, viewing man in his best estate, we ask, *Wherein is he to be accounted of?* Formed of the dust of the earth, enfeebled by his revolt from God, depraved by bad principles and habits, subjected to continual changes, and of himself insufficient for performing what is truly good, he cannot possibly be a proper object of trust and confidence. How mean our original! How frail our condition! How sinful our conduct! Every thing in us, and belonging to us, is suited to abase: in us dwelleth no good thing: misery is in all our ways: vanity is inscribed on all our enjoyments; whilst we are continually varying, and ever subject to dissolution. Aware then of man's insignificance, and utter insufficiency to prove a stay and support, let us refrain from placing our dependence upon him; and trust in the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength, unchangeable love, and invariable fidelity. 'Thou, O Lord, wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.'

The predictions we have now been considering, received their literal fulfilment in the day of the Lord, wherein the Almighty executed terrible judgments, by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, upon the proud and idolatrous Jews. That remarkable period we con-

sider only as a figure of what is emphatically called, the great and terrible day of the Lord, which shall lay low every one that is proud and haughty, and bring down every thing that exalteth itself against the glory of God and his Son; wherein idolaters and idols shall be totally exterminated, angels shall remove from the kingdom of God all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and Jehovah alone shall be exalted. Let us improve the partial accomplishment of these prophecies, for establishing our faith in the word of God; and for encouraging our expectations in the farther, and still more glorious completion of the great events here foretold, in their full extent.

Z

PRELIMI.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

IN this chapter the prophet foretels the approaching direful calamities which were to be inflicted upon Judah and Jerusalem on account of their sins; some of which are particularly mentioned.—He begins by informing them, that they should be deprived of the supports of life, and good government; in consequence of which, they should fall into the utmost disorder and confusion, as the just punishment of their iniquities, and impudence in sinning against the Lord, verse 1.—9.—After which, comfortable assurance is given to the righteous, that, notwithstanding the extensive threatened judgments, they should enjoy safety, whilst the wicked suffered deserved destruction, verse 10. and 11.—To justify the divine procedure, the predicted miseries are declared to arise, in a special manner, from the oppression and covetousness of their rulers, with whom Isaiah warmly expostulates in the name of God, verse 12.—15.—The haughty daughters of Zion are then threatened with being stript of all the costly ornaments with which they were accustomed to adorn themselves, so that their condition should be totally reversed, verse 16.—24.—The chapter concludes by declaring, that the terrible devastation to be made by the sword was to be attended with mourning and lamentation, verse 25. and 26. and verse 1. of chap. iv.

 C H A P. III.

FOR behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts doth take away from Jerusalem, and from Judah, the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water.

The

The omniscient God, having predicted, by the prophet, the awful judgments he was about to execute upon the idolatrous, the proud, and the haughty, proceeds to foretel the certain and sudden destruction of the Jewish state. The word *for*, in the beginning of the verse, seems to connect this prediction with the foregoing one, to which it has an intimate relation. The subject is introduced with great solemnity and majesty. Behold, the Lord, &c. Attentively consider the important, interesting matters I am now going to describe, which justly merit your serious regard. The Lord of hosts, whom you have highly provoked by your sins; who brought all things into existence, and continually upholds them in being, by the word of his power; who ruleth in heaven, and on earth, according to his pleasure; who gives law to the universe, and presides over the nations, and who hath unquestionable right to punish proud transgressors; this almighty Lord declares, he doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah, from the inhabitants of the towns and country of Judea, the staff of bread, and stay of water. Though the professing people of God, they were become extremely corrupt and wicked, and therefore obnoxious to the most terrible calamities.—The stay and the staff may denote, any thing used as a mean of support, to prevent one from falling. The Jewish nation, at this time, may be considered as represented by an old building, ready to fall into ruin, to prevent which many props had been added. These supports on which it leaned, that were derived from the authority, the prudence, and fortitude of its leading men, God threatens to remove; in consequence of which, the state should as certainly become ruinous as a decayed building, when the props on which it rested are taken away. The kings of Judah being deprived of their majesty, their counsellors of wisdom, their soldiers of valour, their judges of prudence, their orators of eloquence, and their kingdom of prosperity, the once flourishing people of
Judea

Judea should be reduced to the most miserable condition.

The whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water. Of the various provisions used to support human life, bread and water are the most simple, and the most necessary: bread strengthens the heart, and water quenches the thirst; and both are useful for refreshment and nourishment. They are therefore very properly described in scripture as a staff and a stay, because they are the means of sustaining life, even as a staff on which we lean supports the body; and when reduced to a scanty allowance of these necessaries, men become weak, languid, and infirm. Now when God here declares, that he taketh away the whole stay of bread and water, he threatens to send upon the men of Judah the direful calamity of famine, whereby they were to be enfeebled and weakened; and, under this terrible judgment, howling with distress, and pining with want, after having been brought into the greatest straits, in which men should eat the flesh of their own arm, and mothers their own children, they should languish and die. How dreadful were the effects that attended this fore judgment, when this prediction was fulfilled! of which we read in the fourth chapter of the book of Lamentations, ‘The tongue of the sucking child
 ‘ cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the
 ‘ young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it
 ‘ unto them. They that did feed delicately, are de-
 ‘ solate in the streets: they that were brought up in
 ‘ scarlet, embrace dunghills.’ In consequence of which, it is said, at the 9th verse, ‘They that be slain
 ‘ with the sword, are better than they that be slain
 ‘ with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through
 ‘ for want of the fruits of the field.’—How deplorable would you justly reckon your condition, did your children come around you, crying for bread and water, whilst you had none to give them! How much more aggravated would be your misery,

fery, were you under the direful necessity of feeding upon them, as the only means of preserving life, as did the people in Judea, at the time this prophecy was accomplished! Thankful then ought we to be to that God, who, notwithstanding our ingratitude, and misimprovement of his mercies, gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, fills our hearts with food and gladness, and affords us all things pertaining to life and godliness richly to enjoy.

2 The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient.

The almighty God here threatens to deprive Judah and Jerusalem of the supports of their state, and the pillars of their church; in consequence of which, they would fall into disorder, confusion, and every evil work.—In a flourishing community there are mighty men, who are remarkable for their strength and valour, courage and intrepidity, who are employed to act as warriors against the common enemy. There are men of war, who are valiant, active, and brave in the field; who act as officers and soldiers in the army, which forms the defence of their country, and the protection of their fellow-citizens. There are judges, who study the laws of God and their country, its civil constitution, and the rights of the people, whose business is to attend to the impartial distribution of justice. There are prophets, who are employed in declaring the mind of God to the people, instructing them in the knowledge of his will, and teaching them statutes, ordinances, and laws; and likewise in pleading with God in behalf of the people, that he may protect, bless, and enrich them. There are prudent men, who are remarkable for sagacity and penetration, for extensive knowledge and sound wisdom; who are justly respected on account of their good conduct, their discretion, and the right management of their affairs.

affairs. There are also ancient men, in the advanced stages of life, who, from long experience, and careful observation, are well acquainted with men and things; who are capable of instructing the young and the thoughtless, and giving them good advice. These respectable and useful characters the Lord of hosts was about to take away from among the men of Judah, with others described in the following verse:

3 The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.

The captain of fifty. Not only were their generals and commanders to be removed from among them, who conducted their armies, and had the management of their military affairs, but the righteous judgments of the Most High were to be extended to those of less authority and influence. *And the honourable man*, who was exalted to distinguished rank, and high station; who claimed much respect on account of his good qualifications, and his extensive usefulness to society. *And the counsellor*, who sat at the helm of public affairs, giving direction in the critical moment of danger; who formed great designs for the benefit of the state, and marked out the plans which were necessary to be carried into execution. *And the cunning artificer*, the skilful artist, and ingenious mechanic, who, by indefatigable industry and application to business, contributed to the wealth and reputation of the nation. *And the eloquent orator*, who, by the power of persuasion and fine address, could influence the hearts and sentiments of a whole assembly, and give them as uniform a direction as the wind does the trees of the forest. All these useful ornaments of society God threatens to take away from Judah and Jerusalem, by depriving them of the great abilities they possessed; by baffling the enterprises in which they engaged; by frustrating the designs which they formed;

formed; by cutting them off by the sword, famine, or pestilence; or by delivering them into the hands of their enemies, to lead them captive into a strange land. The strength of the mighty man, the equity of the judge, the instructions of the prophet, the counsels of the prudent, the influence of the ancient, the ability of the officers, the example of the honourable, the advice of the counsellors, the skill of the artificer, and the eloquence of the orator, were the great supports of the state. The removal, therefore, of these pillars, on which the public welfare depended, would be attended with certain ruin, and occasion the immediate downfall and destruction of the whole fabric of the state.—Read the exact accomplishment of this prediction, recorded 2 Kings xxiv. 10th, and following verses.—Let us, brethren, be thankful to the Governor among the nations, who raises up among us men of such illustrious characters as these above mentioned, to be the ornaments and strength of the community to which we belong; and let us hold such in reputation for their works sake.

4 And I will give children *to be* their princes, and babes shall rule over them.

The nation of the Jews, deprived of the care and management of prudent, able men, was to be intrusted to those who were weak, unexperienced, and unskilful. I presume it is unnecessary to understand the words literally, and to explain them in the strictest sense, of babes and children. Let it suffice to remark, that the princes and rulers of that people, who, in the days of their prosperity, were renowned for their wisdom, vigour, and the administration of government, were to be succeeded by persons either under age, subject to tutors, incapable of managing their own affairs, and much more of directing the important concerns of others; or, if come to age, were yet children in understanding, and unfit for holding the
reins

reins of government. This is a heavy judgment upon a people and land: and, in this view, God speaks of it by the wisest of kings; ‘Wo to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning. Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength and not for drunkenness*.’ Some princes and rulers are bestowed upon a nation in great mercy, and prove inestimable blessings to those over whom they preside; others are given in wrath and judgment, and prove severe scourges to their subjects. Among this latter class, we rank those here mentioned, who were totally incapable of performing the difficult duties of their elevated station, the lamentable effects of which must have been severely felt through the whole body of the nation. Such was the destitute condition of Judah, after Nebuchadnezzar carried away to Babylon Jehoiakim, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, and all the craftsmen, when, we suppose, this prediction was verified.—Sensible of the many important advantages, sacred and civil, that we enjoy, under the best of governments, let us value and improve them; and diligently beware of forfeiting them to ourselves, or posterity, by a careless abuse of them.

5 And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.

The dissolution of good order, and political confusion, are here described, as the dismal consequences of the judgments mentioned in the foregoing verses. Oppression and pride every where prevail. The Hebrew word translated *oppressed*, signifies *to demand by force*,

* Eccles. x. 16, 17.

to compel to work, or pay debt or tribute. And as labour, debt, and tribute, are often demanded with violence and cruelty, in a manner inconsistent with right and equity, it is called oppression. The word may denote here, either that oppression which comes from the tongue, or from the hand; that which is inflicted by violence, or executed by fraud; whether it consists in injuriously with-holding what is due, or forcibly taking away what is rightfully enjoyed, or unjustly hurting by unmerited censure, or evil-speaking. This oppression Solomon observes, in his book of Ecclesiastes, makes a wise man mad. Indeed fools are not greatly distressed by it, because they do not understand justice and equity; and therefore tyrants commonly endeavour to keep their subjects in ignorance and poverty. When rigorously exercised, however, upon people of sense and knowledge, it is enough to render them distracted. Such was the iniquitous conduct of the men of Judah toward one another: such was their injurious behaviour toward their neighbours, whom they ought to have loved as themselves, and to whom they ought to have done whatsoever they would that they should do to them. Those in high rank knew the incapacity of the prince to detect their artful frauds, or to check their avaricious measures, whereby they meant to enrich themselves. Those in the lower walks of life, distressed by the oppression of the great, from which they could not obtain redress, and unawed by the fear of punishment, imitated the great in their rapacity, cruelty, and injustice, until the practice complained of becomes universal, as here intimated:

The child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable. Oppression is accompanied with pride, which leads to the most indecent and ridiculous behaviour. Among the many excellent statutes which God delivered to his people Israel, the following is recorded: ‘Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face

‘ of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord*.’ He hath commanded to render unto all their due, fear to whom fear, and honour to whom honour belongeth, either on account of advanced age, high station, or important office. Indeed honour is not only due to those who are our superiors in any of these respects, but to those who are our equals, yea, even to those who are our inferiors, as is evident from such apostolical directions as these; ‘ Be kindly affectionate one to another, in honour preferring one another †: In lowliness of mind let each esteem another better than himself ‡.’ How diametrically opposite to this good conduct is the supercilious behaviour here described! The child in age, in understanding, in experience, foolishly over-rating his natural endowments, his acquired abilities, his supposed qualities, and specious performances, assumes a most unbecoming, haughty behaviour toward those whom he ought highly to respect, for their age, their judgment, and experience, and the other advantages which they possess.—The base, *i. e.* those of mean parentage, and in low circumstances in the world, who ought, in a special manner, to cultivate a humble temper and deportment, suited to their condition, discovered indecent pride and insolence toward those who were descended of illustrious ancestors, and were in high rank and eminent station. Thus the beautiful order which the great Lord of all hath established among society is inverted; transgressors incur much guilt; and though the profligacy and depravity of the times might screen them from the hand of justice, those against whom they acted thus undutifully, would most sensibly feel the indignities they received.—The prophet Jeremiah mentions the accomplishment of this prediction, Lam. iv. 16. where we thus read; ‘ The anger of the Lord hath divided them, he will no more regard them: they respected not the per-

* Lev. xix. 32.

† Rom. xii. 10.

‡ Philip. ii. 3.

‘ *sons*

‘sons of the priests, they favoured not the elders.’—Beware then, my friends, of oppression and pride, which disturb the good order and happiness of mankind; and which, when properly considered, appear to be not only aggravated iniquities, but terrible judgments. Diligently attend to the relative duties incumbent upon you, in your various stations and connections. Endeavour to perform them with fidelity and diligence, that thereby you may promote the happiness of society, adorn your holy profession, and the amiable doctrines of God our Saviour.

6 When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, *saying*, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and *let* this ruin *be* under thy hand.

The description of the confused, disturbed state of the Jewish nation, at the time referred to, is here continued.—Then a person would take hold of some of his connections, who were chief of their fathers houses, in this manner expressing his earnest desire, that the request he was going to present might be speedily granted. This action is repeatedly mentioned in scripture, as intended for this purpose. We are told, that ‘as Samuel turned about to go away, Saul laid hold of the skirt of his mantle* :’ and that ‘in those days (referred to by the prophet) it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you †.’ The words represent, a person earnestly supplicating from his friend that assistance to the state, which he reckoned him capable of affording. When we reflect for a moment on the anarchy and confusion which

* 1 Sam. xv. 27.

† Zech. viii. 23.

every where pervaded the nation, we cannot justly be surpris'd that proper persons would be extremely reluctant, and prevail'd upon with great difficulty, to accept places of public trust and power, as here plainly suppos'd. No wonder that men entertain a strong aversion at being concern'd in the affairs of government, in critical and unfavourable circumstances.

Thou hast clothing, &c. rich garments, suitable to the dignity of chief magistrate, and canst make an appearance becoming the character of one invest'd with supreme authority. Thou hast vast abundance and variety of raiment in thy wardrobes, sufficient for a person of such high rank, to bestow in presents on proper occasions.—*Be thou our ruler*: occupy the chief place, and exercise the highest power in the state; point out the measures we ought to adopt, publish the laws we ought to obey, go before us by thy example, preside over us by thy authority, shew us what we ought to do; and we will be obedient to thy orders, and submissive to thy authority.—*And let this ruin be under thy hand*; or according to a various reading, making a very good sense, “Take “into thy hand our ruinous state*.” Endeavour, if possible, to retrieve our affairs, now in sad disorder, prognosticating our destruction as a people: deliver, if possible, from injustice and oppression, from foreign enemies and domestic troubles; and, in the prosecution of these great and important purposes, we will act as thy dutiful subjects. A sense of imminent danger, and urgent necessity, never fails to render men importunate for assistance and relief. Improve this principle in your addresses to the Almighty, by taking hold of God's strength; by earnestly soliciting his interposition in your favour, that he may take under his hand our ruined state, and recover us from the direful effects of our apostacy from him.

* Mentioned by the Bishop of London.

7 In that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be an healer; for in my house *is* neither bread nor clothing; make me not a ruler of the people.

This verse contains the peremptory reply made to the request presented in the foregoing one, with the reason why the proposal there made was rejected without hesitation.—The person applied to by his friend, shall, in the most solemn manner, decline to undertake the very difficult work to which he was invited. With elevated voice, and lifted-up hand, he shall solemnly swear, that he will not accept of the offer made him of being a ruler. It is doubtless lawful for persons to take an oath, when their testimony cannot otherwise be believed, and the matter is in itself of considerable importance: for thus it is written, Deut. vi. 13. 'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.' In this manner we acknowledge the omniscience of God, we confess his consummate wisdom, we do homage to his almighty power and goodness; and by thus confirming our declaration, put an end to all strife, respecting the matter of the oath. To give a determinate final answer, that would admit of no dispute, to the entreaty of his brother, the person replying, invokes the sacred name of God, and appeals to the avenger of falsehood, that he would not accept the office of a ruler.—The Hebrew word translated *ruler*, is derived from one that signifies *to bind up*; and in a figurative sense, *to heal*, as the skilful binding up a wound, or broken member, is of great consequence toward its cure. In a metaphorical sense, it also signifies a ruler or governor, because he ought to conciliate breaches, and make up differences, which arise among the people. The commonwealth of Israel, at the time referred to, was in a distempered, broken condition, and needed much a healer, to bind it up; but none could be found to undertake the arduous work.

work. Persons applied to for this purpose, peremptorily refused to comply with the solicitations they received; for which the following reason is assigned:

For in my house is neither bread nor clothing, &c. It was customary in Eastern countries, where fashions did not vary as among us, to collect immense quantities of clothes and provisions, not only for the person's own use, and that of his family, but for presents upon proper occasions. This appears plainly, from the sacred writings, to have been the practice among the Jews; of which there are several descriptions, and to which there are some allusions. This, as a celebrated writer observes, explains the meaning of the excuse made by him that is desired to undertake the government. He alledges, he hath not wherewithal to support the dignity of that station, by such acts of liberality and hospitality as the law and custom required of persons in high rank. He therefore requests, that there might not be any farther proposal made to him of this kind. The fulfilment of what we have been considering, seems to have taken place in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, after the carrying away of Jehoiakim; which, so far as we learn from scripture, perfectly agreed to the deplorable state of the Jewish nation at that period.—From hence we learn, that as in times of national prosperity men are commonly ambitious of obtaining power and preferment, so in calamitous seasons places of eminence and trust are often refused, and filled with difficulty. There are sometimes disorders in the state, like certain diseases of the body, which defy the skill of the most eminent physicians, which no person will undertake to remedy, when one dangerous symptom appears after another: this gives rise to despair, which accelerates approaching ruin.

§ For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the LORD, to provoke the eyes of his glory.

These

These words may be considered as a vindication of the divine procedure toward the people of Judah. The description of their calamitous condition, in the first part of the verse, is short, but affecting.—Jerusalem, once the joy of the whole earth, beautiful for situation, highly favoured of Heaven, a flourishing, populous, renowned city, is become a heap of ruins; and the inhabitants of Judah, formerly possessed of the most distinguished privileges, is divested of all their dignity, and reduced to the most depressed condition. Much having been already said on this mournful subject, I only remark, that as the rod of affliction hath a voice which ought to be heard by those whom it smites, so it ought likewise to be attended to by those who hear of its stroke, that from thence they may derive instruction. The ruin of Jerusalem, and the fall of Judah, are recorded for our admonition; not merely for our information, but for our learning. Let us not then think it sufficient, that, with the many, we reproach that people for their sins, the procuring causes of their desolation; but let us endeavour to reap benefit to ourselves from their calamities, and to learn wisdom and obedience from their folly and undutiful conduct.—This description did not correspond with the state of Jerusalem and Judah at the time this prophecy was delivered, for then they were in a flourishing condition, but with what it should undoubtedly be at the period the prediction received its accomplishment, in the days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah; and to intimate its certain fulfilment and speedy approach, the prophet speaks as if this had been their present condition.—The reason of this ruin and fall is assigned in the following words:

Because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The tongue is the chief instrument of speech, which communicates to others the images of the mind, and sentiments of the heart. When employed in speaking, it commonly discovers the dispositions of which men are possessed;

ed ; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Hence our prophet observes, ‘ The vile person will speak villany * :’ and the apostle John, describing the character of worldly men, thus speaks, ‘ They are of the world : therefore speak they of the world † ;’ for they have nothing else to speak of. People acting under the influence of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, seldom fail to express their opposition to the purity of his law, the dispensations of his providence, the admonitions of his servants, and the benevolent designs of his grace. On this wicked practice was founded the bitter complaint which the Most High brought against his people, by the prophet Malachi ; ‘ Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord ‡.’ To this heavy charge they reply, ‘ What have we spoken against thee ?’ To check their insolence, the Lord informs them, that their words were stout against him, in as much as they had said, ‘ It is vain to serve God, and keep his ordinances.’ Such also seems to have been the sinful practice of Judah, for which they were to be severely punished.—Besides, their doings also were against the Lord. Their words and actions exactly corresponded, discovering their opposition to God, against whom they acted in direct hostility. Though they professed to love and honour him, they trampled on his sacred authority ; they counteracted his blessed will ; they despised his ordinances, and transgressed his most just commandments ; and notwithstanding severe corrections, they continued incorrigible in their sins.

To provoke the eyes of his glory. The eye is that curious organ of the body whereby objects are perceived, and knowledge is conveyed into the heart. In reference to its extensive usefulness to men, eyes are ascribed to God in scripture, to intimate his perfect knowledge of all things, and strict acquaintance

* Isaiah xxxii. 6.

† 1 John iv. 5.

‡ Mal. iii. 13.

with mens characters and conduct. Indeed the Lord seeth not as man seeth, who seeth objects at a distance one after another, and can only discover their exterior form, whilst he may be mistaken and imposed upon by deceitful appearances. ‘The Lord
 ‘looketh down from heaven, and full well beholdeth
 ‘all the sons of men: his eyes are in every place, be-
 ‘holding the evil and the good: he searcheth the heart,
 ‘and trieth the reins;’ so that he cannot be deceived, nor can any thing be concealed from his view. With great propriety are his all-penetrating eyes called the eyes of his glory, or his glorious eyes.—Beware then, brethren, of speaking and acting against the Lord. For this purpose adopt the wise resolution of the man according to God’s own heart, ‘I will take
 ‘heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue*.’ One would think he might rather have said, I will take heed to my words, that I offend not with my tongue. When our ways are wrong, our words are seldom right: the tongue is soon out of the way of speaking rightly, when we go out of the way of acting properly. He that offendeth with his tongue, is apt to offend in his ways; and having transgressed in his ways, he is in greater danger of offending with his tongue. ‘Keep your hearts with all diligence, for
 ‘out of them are the issues of life †.’

9 ¶ The shew of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide *it* not: wo unto their soul, for they have rewarded evil unto themselves.

A circumstance is here mentioned, which greatly aggravated the iniquity of Judah: they had put off shame and bashfulness; they had become bold and impudent, in committing the most abominable crimes. They gloried in their shame; and, as God testified

* Psal. xxxix. 1.

† Prov. iv. 23.

by another prophet, ‘ All the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted *.’ God hath so formed man, and so closely connected his soul and body, that the one hath a reciprocal influence on the other; in consequence of which, the various affections and passions of the mind seldom fail to discover themselves in the face. Hence the common expressions of a sad and joyful, a proud and fierce countenance. Indeed the prevailing disposition of the mind is often conspicuous in the face: if it is envy and discontent, the countenance falls; if meekness and modesty, it appears serene, and full of complacency. And such was the external aspect of the people to whom Isaiah delivered this prophecy, that it testified against them, that they were proud and self-conceited, foolish and extravagant in the commission of enormous transgressions.—*And they declare their sin as Sodom, they bide it not.* The men of Sodom were very wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly; their sin was grievous, and the cry of it reached up to heaven. They committed all manner of wickedness with greediness; and, far from concealing it, they gloried in their iniquity. They did not declare their sins like those who are humbled for them before God, who declare them that they may be justified; but they impudently published them, counting it a pleasure to riot in the day, and sinning openly in the face of the sun. How lamentable the condition of Jerusalem, the city of the great King, when she resembled a place famous for wickedness through the whole earth! To such a dreadful pitch of impiety had the men of Judah arrived, that the prophet Jeremiah enters against them this bitter complaint; ‘ Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush †. Their foreheads were as iron, and their brows brass;’ which plainly shewed, that they were lost to all sense of the evil and malignity of sin, as is here intimated.

* Ezek. iii. 7.

† Jer. vi. 15.

Wo unto their soul, for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. They might promise themselves peace and happiness, but complicated calamities, and inevitable destruction, were suddenly to overwhelm them; and their very soul, the chief subject of happiness or misery, was to be filled with sorrow, lamentation, and wo, and covered with everlasting shame and contempt. This misery and wo should be greatly aggravated, by the moving consideration that they had brought it upon themselves. Their own evil-doings were the procuring causes of their destruction, and the very means whereby it was effectuated. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, ‘ Their way and their doings procured these things unto them *.’ And as the prophet Hosea informed them, ‘ Thy destruction is from thyself †.’ The men of Judah might foolishly imagine, that it proceeded from the Most High; from the wrath and rage, the malice and cruelty of their enemies, or the treachery and neglect of their friends. God therefore informs them, that their destruction and misery did not originate from friends or enemies, nor from himself, but was the fruit of their own wicked ways, whereby they rewarded evil to themselves.—We are apt to attribute the good we enjoy to our wisdom, power, and good conduct, and thus to ascribe to our own nets: we are prone to ascribe all the evil we suffer to some foreign cause, and thus extenuate our own guilt. The reverse of this is the truth, as is plain from the words before us, where we are taught to charge our destruction on ourselves, to whom alone it is owing. Under all the evils then which we suffer, let us ever recollect, that they are the just rewards of our evil-doings, and the bad effects of our transgressions against the Lord.

10 Say ye to the righteous, that *it shall be well with him*: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

* Jer. iv. 12.

† Hosea xiii. 9.

Our prophet, with other servants of God, are here charged to announce a most comfortable message to his upright people, expressive of that tender affection, and paternal care, which the Almighty never fails to discover for them on every proper occasion.—Say ye to the righteous, not to those who are righteous in their own eyes, or who appear to be righteous in the view of others. There is a generation who are clean in their own eyes, who notwithstanding are an abomination to the Lord; and there is also a generation who have made clean the outside of the cup and platter, and assumed a specious appearance before men, who are inwardly full of all manner of unrighteousness. To neither of these classes of people ought the servants of God to say, it shall be well; but to those who are righteous indeed, through the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe, in virtue of which they are delivered from the guilt of sin, they enjoy the favour of God, and a right to eternal inheritance. Their spiritual distempers being removed, they are restored to the proper exercise of their various powers and faculties, which they employ in serving God in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of their life, yielding their members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Their minds are furnished with right principles: they have a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. Their actions are conducted by the right rule of God's holy precepts, and the spotless example of the just One; being taught, by the grace of God, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world. In few words, they walk uprightly, and work righteousness, and speak the truth in their hearts. He that doth these things shall never be moved. Be solicitous to attain this desirable character, which, according to the maxim of the wise man, will render you more excellent than your neighbours.—To persons of this description, God hath directed his servants to say,

It shall be well with him. It must be so. All the perfections of Jehovah shall be employed for their benefit: his irresistible power shall strengthen and protect them; his infinite wisdom shall instruct and guide them; his tender mercy shall pardon and uphold them; his everlasting faithfulness shall be their shield and buckler; his boundless grace shall animate and comfort, and his glorious all-sufficiency shall enrich and satisfy them. All the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel shall be accomplished for their happiness: in which are contained, mercy to pardon, grace to help, consolation to support, counsel to direct; the divine presence in every condition; grace, and glory, and every good thing; and the reviving assurance, that all things shall work together for their good. All the inestimable privileges peculiar to the children of God shall constitute their felicity; such as union with Jesus Christ, in whom dwells all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; the forgiveness of sins, through him who died for their offences; reconciliation to God, through the death of his Son; the protection of the kind providence of God; and his Holy Spirit, to instruct and assist them in all things. The most ample encouragements, presented in the word of God, accompanied with divine power, shall thoroughly furnish them for the performance of every good work. There they are assured of gracious assistance, and acceptance through Jesus Christ; that their prayers shall ascend before God as incense, their praises as the evening-sacrifice; that their charity shall be an odour of a sweet smell; and that their doing good is well pleasing in his sight, who will mercifully remember, and bountifully reward all their labours of love. Besides, they entertain the most certain, glorious prospects, that God will never leave nor forsake them; that goodness and mercy shall continually attend them; and that, in due time, their heavenly Father will conduct them to his immediate presence and glory, where they shall

shall for ever be well and happy, beyond what the most enlarged heart can possibly conceive.—The reason of this declaration is subjoined :

For they shall eat the fruit of their own doings. Similar expressions are often used in scripture, to signify, that good men shall receive a reward adequate to their works of righteousness. The man according to God's own heart affirms, ' That light is sown for the ' righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart * . ' Great peace (saith he) have they who love God's ' law, and nothing shall offend them † . In keeping ' God's true and righteous judgments there is a great ' reward ‡ .' God, by our prophet, declares, ' The ' fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect there- ' of quietness and assurance forever § .' And the Apostle Paul lays it down as an unquestionable maxim, that ' whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he ' also reap § .' These, and other similar passages of scripture, inculcate the important truth contained in the words before us, and give the most explicit assurance, that the labour of the righteous shall not be in vain in the Lord ; and that all the dispensations of providence, whatever aspect they may bear to human view, shall uniformly tend to promote their real welfare. The fruit of their affliction shall be their purification and improvement ; the fruit of their prosperity shall elevate their hearts in the good ways of the Lord ; the fruit of their reproach shall be the Spirit of God, and of glory, resting upon them ; the fruit of their having nothing shall be that they shall possess all things ; and the fruit of their walking in wisdom's ways shall be pleasure and peace. We appeal to the generation of the righteous for the truth of these remarks ; which suggest to you the most animating motives to patient continuance in well-doing ; of which we entreat ye be not weary, for in due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not.

* Psal. xcvii. 11.
 † Isalah xxxii. 17.

‡ Psal. cxix. 165.
 § Gal. vi. 7.

‡ Psal. xix. 11.

11 Wo unto the wicked, *it shall be ill with him:* for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

This alarming declaration, published against those of an opposite character, contains the counterpart to the message delivered in the foregoing verse.—The first thing which demands our attention, is, the character of the persons against whom wo and misery are denounced. The word translated *wicked*, signifies *unquiet*; and so emphatically describes the temper and condition of the ungodly and profane. Unquiet is their name, and unquietness is with them: they disturb and trouble themselves; and often vex and harass others to the utmost of their power. Sin not only exists in their turbulent dispositions, but exercises usurped authority over them, to which they yield not a forced and involuntary subjection, but a chosen and willing obedience. Distracted by various contending passions, which often oppose one another, they are agitated like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt. Far from complaining of their tyrannical authority and destructive influence, and contending with them as their greatest enemies, they readily comply with their demands, and then form plausible excuses to justify their foolish conduct. Though often wearied in the service of divers lusts and pleasures, they industriously proceed to offend yet more and more, and presumptuously to commit all manner of iniquity with greediness. Indifferent to their duty, their danger, and their interest, in proud contempt of God, and the sacred obligations they are under to honour and obey him, they obstinately persist in executing the mischievous devices they have imagined, ruinous to themselves, and hurtful to society. Such are the persons against whom God, by the prophet, denounces complicated misery.

Wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him. It must be so: for they are enemies to God in their minds,
and

and by wicked works; by nature the children of wrath; by practice the children of disobedience, the miserable slaves of Satan, who leads them captive at his pleasure. They lie under the complicated guilt of all their multiplied and aggravated transgressions; for each of which, they deserve that everlasting destruction, of which they are in continual danger; having no security but that every moment they may be summoned to appear before the tribunal of God, where they shall be adjudged to weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, in that place where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Slaves to their insatiable appetites, ever craving, but never satisfied, they feel the anguish which arises from disappointment, resistance, and denial, and the misery which never fails to attend counteracting the influence of the noblest powers of the soul. Besides, they are exposed to innumerable calamities of various kinds, which may suddenly blast their reputation, bereave them of health, deprive them of the delusive peace they enjoy, and plunge them into that endless ruin which they little dreaded.—Say then, brethren, is it not ill with the wicked? Were it lawful for us to wish the worst condition possible to our bitterest enemies, we could not form a wish in which more misery is comprehended than that of Job; ‘Let them be as the wicked and the unrighteous*.’ Men of this character may dream of peace and safety; but the word of God cannot be broken, which saith, ‘There is no peace to the wicked.’ Would to God that such would seriously remember, that the frequent solemn warnings they now receive of their imminent danger, if neglected and despised, will at last greatly aggravate their condemnation and misery! Attend to this ye that forget God, and say in your heart, God hath forgotten. The reason of this declaration is added:

* Job xxvii. 7.

For the reward of his hands shall be given him. The punishment of transgressors shall be proportioned to the wickedness they have committed. ‘ Upon the wicked God shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup *. They shall not only have the cup put into their hands, but they shall be obliged to drink off its bitterest dregs. ‘ God will render to every man according to his work †.’ Do you object to these, and similar passages of scripture, the prosperity of the wicked, who often enjoy most of the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world, and possess the fairest inheritance upon earth? and do you find difficulty in reconciling the proposition before us with your own observation. The prosperity of the wicked does not contradict the truth under consideration, for it is truly ill with a wicked man, even in prosperity: it destroys him, it hardens his heart, it administers fuel to his lusts, and renders calamities more terrible when they arrive. To some of the wicked God dispenses the good things of this life, to furnish them for accomplishing the purposes of his providence, and to recompense them for performing the services assigned them. To others, they are given to discover what is in their hearts, to make them sensible of the iniquities which predominate there, and to leave them wholly without excuse for their sins. And though some of this character seem exempted from many of the ills denounced against the wicked, and do not appear to receive the reward of their hands, yet misery is their just desert, wrath their certain portion, their increase shall go into captivity, their riches shall flee away, their grandeur shall be brought down, their beauty shall be stained, their reputation blasted; so that their fulness shall be converted into emptiness, and all their comforts into wo: and, at the final judgment, they shall be ordered to depart into everlasting fire, pre-

* Psal. xi. 6.

† Rom. ii. 6.

pared for the devil and his angels.—‘ Let the
 ‘ wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man
 ‘ his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord,
 ‘ and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God
 ‘ for he will abundantly pardon. As I live, saith the
 ‘ Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the
 ‘ wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and
 ‘ live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for
 ‘ why will ye die. An all-sufficient remedy is pro-
 vided for your relief, in the mediation of Jesus
 Christ, whereby you may obtain pardon of sin, peace
 with God, and eternal life. Come then to him with-
 out delay, that you may enjoy the inestimable blessings
 contained in his promises.

12 ¶ *As for my people, children are their oppres-*
pressors, and women rule over them: O my
people, they which lead thee, cause thee to err,
and destroy the way of thy paths.

A sharp reproof is here administered to the rulers
 of God’s people, who were chiefly culpable, having
 greatly contributed, by their pernicious influence, and
 bad example, to carry forward that general corruption
 which pervaded all ranks among them.—As for my
 people, saith God, whom I have created for myself,
 that they may shew forth my praise; whom I have
 chosen for my peculiar treasure, above all the people
 on the face of the earth; whom I have redeemed by
 a strong hand, and stretched-out arm; for whose ran-
 som I gave Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sebah; to whom I
 have given statutes, commandments, and ordinances,
 prophets, teachers, and guides, to instruct them; and
 who have been the objects of my peculiar affection,
 and distinguishing care—*Children are their oppress-*
ors, or as the word signifies, rigorous exacters. The
 governors of Judah are called *children*, to intimate,
 that they were weak, imprudent, and unskilful, in the
 management of the public affairs with which they
 were

were intrusted. Nor did they act the part of mild and easy magistrates, but of cruel oppressors, who exerted their authority with rigour and severity, and exacted, without mercy or mitigation, the most grievous demands.—*And women rule over them.* The persons who were concerned in the government were soft and delicate in their manners, variable and inconstant in their pursuits, timid and afraid of dangers, weak, and yet violent in the prosecution of their designs, destitute of firmness and fortitude necessary to the surmounting of those difficulties which every where occur.—*O my people, they who lead thee, cause thee to err.* The word rendered *lead*, signifies also *to bless*; and both meanings may be comprehended in the character mentioned. They, whose office it was to shew the people of God their transgressions, to make known to them the way of salvation, and to go before them in that way, so as to excite them by their influence and example to walk in the commandments of the Lord; they, whose business it ought to have been to bless the people in the name of the Lord, and to beseech God that he might be pleased effectually to bless them, instead of faithfully performing the duties of their function, caused the people to err. Men are naturally inclined to err, prone to embrace error rather than truth, to walk in crooked ways rather than in the onward path of life. The misery of that people must be truly great, whose teachers, instead of correcting their errors, and conducting them in the paths of righteousness, lead them astray: who, instead of shewing them their sins, encourage them in their evil ways; saying, Peace, peace to them, for whom there is no peace.—*And destroy the way of thy paths.* From the various senses of the word translated *destroy*, which signifies also *to pervert* or *swallow*, we may collect the import of the charge brought against the leaders of the people. These teachers, by their corrupt doctrines, and bad examples, perverted the right ways of the Lord, in which they ought to have conducted those

those committed to their care. They destroyed the key of knowledge, neither entering into the way of life themselves, nor suffering others to walk in it, so that few upright servants of God could be seen among them. This, in fact, was the very character of the Jewish doctors about the time of the Babylonish captivity, as we learn from the mournful complaints of the prophets; one of which you will find recorded, Ezek. xiii. from the beginning.—Let us improve these affecting representations of the deplorable condition of God's ancient people, for exciting us to thankfulness for the many important advantages we enjoy, and a dutiful concern to profit by means of them.

13 The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people.

In these words the Almighty declares his fixed purpose speedily to execute righteous judgment upon his people.—It was anciently the practice among Eastern nations, for judges to sit in the gates, where they determined the causes which were brought before them for decision; and then the parties, or their counsel, stood up in their presence. In reference to this custom, God condescends to declare, that he standeth up to plead his righteous cause against the rulers of his people. Such is his admirable grace, that he not only permits men to plead before him, but descending as it were from his tribunal, and suspending his sovereign rights, he offers to plead before them, to account for his conduct, and submit himself to the reason and judgment of impartial judges. The Most High appears in a posture ready to enumerate the injuries he had received, to bring the criminal conduct of the rebellious under review, and most effectually to plead against them with his great power, not only by the words of his mouth, but by the awful vengeance of his providence. In this manner God threatened he would plead against Gog and Magog: ‘I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood, and
‘I will

‘ I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone *.’ In this sense we understand the expression before us.

And standeth to judge the people. Though God condescends to plead, he still acts in the character of supreme Judge; and, in allusion to the practice of judges, who often stand when they deliver their opinions, and pronounce their decisions, he is represented standing in the congregation of the mighty, and judging among the gods. It belongs to the office of a judge to pronounce sentence on the criminal, and to take care that the sentence be duly executed. Accordingly God, the Judge of all, hath delivered his unalterable decision respecting men of every character and condition, in his blessed word, which he never fails to carry into execution in the course of his universal providence. Indeed sentence against an evil work is often not speedily executed; space is given for repentance: but, alas! on this account the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though for wise purposes it may be long delayed, it is always executed in the most proper season, when God standeth to judge the people, and to render unto them according to their works. The right hand of the Lord is full of righteousness: what he hath promised shall certainly be performed, and what he hath threatened shall as certainly be inflicted, when he ariseth to judgment.—Behold, the Judge standeth before the door. He is already near, and he will certainly and suddenly appear to execute judgment, not only to avenge the injuries offered to his people, but to punish them for their transgressions. Let us be daily looking for, and hastening to the coming of the day of God, knowing that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly as a thief in the night; then we must all stand before his judgment-seat, and receive according to our deeds.

* Ezek. xxxviii. 22.

14 The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

In this, and the following verse, the ground of God's controversy with the rulers of his people is described. One person is said to enter into judgment with another, when a process at law is commenced, a libel is drawn up by one party against the other, who is served, at the instance of the former, with an indictment, and proper evidences are summoned to prove the matters alledged. In reference to this practice, God is said to enter into judgment with men, when, by his providential dispensations, he takes the necessary steps for executing deserved punishment on men for their transgressions. Deeply affected with awful views of divine vengeance, David earnestly supplicates, that God would not enter into judgment with him *.—The persons with whom God would enter into judgment, were the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof. The former might denote the elders, and persons of age and experience, who held offices of trust and influence in the church; and by the latter might be meant, men of high rank, great reputation, vast opulence, and extensive power in the state. These were the men who caused the people to err, and grievously oppressed them; with whom, therefore, God was highly displeased. No condition however elevated, no station however distinguished, can exempt from divine judgments those who are leaders in transgression, who ought to lay their account with the punishment they have merited.—The first article mentioned in the charge, is, *Ye have eaten up the vineyards*. The land of Canaan was remarkable for the fertility of its soil, the great increase which it yielded, the excellent vine-

* Psa. cxliii. 2.

yards with which it abounded, and the rich wine it produced. Vineyards were so common, that they were not peculiar to the rich and great, but often were possessed by lower classes of the people. Naboth had a vineyard that was coveted by his prince: and such was the avarice and oppression of the elders and princes of Judah, at the time referred to, that they carried away the fruit of the vineyards which belonged to the poorer sort of people, and converted the property of the indigent into fuel to their luxury and pride. It deserves to be remarked, that the word translated *caten up*, signifies also *burnt*, as it is rendered in the margin of some Bibles: and in this sense the charge becomes still heavier; importing, that such was the cruelty and violence of the ancients and the princes, that they not only eat the fruit of the vineyards belonging to the poor, but they afterward burnt and destroyed the vineyards themselves.

And the spoil of the poor is in your houses. They had enriched themselves by rapine and plunder, and laid up in store in their houses the spoil they had collected. We may naturally suppose, that the elders and princes did not confine their avaricious, oppressive practices to the fruits of the vineyards, but all the other possessions of the poor would doubtless share the same fate. The righteous Lord, who defends the cause of the poor and fatherless, was the constant witness of all their injurious conduct, on account of which he threatens to execute upon them deserved judgment.—Let us beware then of injuring any man, particularly the poor, who are most easily, and therefore most commonly oppressed, assuredly knowing that God will certainly punish such notorious transgressions.

15 What mean ye *that* ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

The

The Most High warmly expostulates with the rulers of his people respecting their injustice and oppression.—What is your design in committing such atrocious wickedness, without the least colour of reason or justice? Have you any plausible pretext whereby you pretend to vindicate your cruel conduct, which is totally inconsistent with the dictates of humanity and equity? Say, what mean ye, that ye beat my people to pieces? They are not your people, but mine, whom I created by my power, whom I formed for my glory, and redeemed for my praise. Though I allowed you to rule over them, they are the offspring of my goodness, the workmanship of my hands, and the objects of my distinguishing care. Rebellious as they have been, and sinful as they are, I will not permit them to be abused or trampled upon with impunity. Why then do you tread them under foot, like the mire of the streets; and, through your intolerable pride and self-conceit, treat them with the utmost severity and contempt.—*And grind the faces of the poor.* By various acts of tyranny and oppression, you reduce the poor not only to a state of abject poverty, but of ignominious servitude, in which their spirits are vexed, and their dejection and anguish of mind is visible in their countenances. Of all this accumulated distress, which you ought to have prevented or alleviated, you are the unworthy authors.—This heavy charge is authenticated by these solemn words; *Saith the Lord of hosts*, the almighty God, who keepeth truth for ever, who executeth judgment for the oppressed, who giveth food to the hungry, and looseth the prisoners.—Such conduct toward the poor, I hope, my brethren, you heartily detest, as discovering a mean and sordid spirit, a cruel and inhuman temper, and a culpable contempt of those whom we ought to compassionate and relieve. If it is sinful to disregard the necessities of the poor, how odious and wicked a part do they act, who bring men into poverty, and then distress them! Oppression is an enormous crime in all who are guilty

of it, but especially when committed by those who ought to be the guardians and protectors of the weak and the injured.

16 ¶ Moreover, the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-forth necks, and wanton eyes, walking, and mincing *as* they go, and making a tinkling with their feet.

In this, and the following verses, the prophet delivers the message he had received from God to the Hebrew women, wherein he specifies many instances of their foolish pride and extravagance, on account of which several severe judgments are denounced against them.—*Moreover, the Lord saith.* The persons to whom he conveyed this information might have been apt to censure the freedom he used upon this occasion, and therefore he introduces the subject by opening his commission, and acquainting them, that he had authority from God for what he was about to deliver.—*Because the daughters of Zion are haughty.* Zion, you know, was the mountain on which stood the city and palace of the kings of Israel; and the temple of the Lord, in which were performed the solemn exercises of his worship. The daughters of Zion were the female sex, who collected the spoils of the common people, and indulged themselves in the pride and profusion after mentioned; who might be thus described, to remind them of the inconsistency of their character and conduct, who, instead of following vain fashions, ought to have dressed themselves as becometh women professing godliness.—The complaint brought against them was, that they were haughty and proud; and that their haughtiness discovered itself in their whole manner, in their various gestures, in their several motions, and in all their appearances. The length of their necks, the wantonness of their eyes, the movements

of their feet, on which they wore chains or rings, which made a tinkling sound as they walked, all shewed that their chief business was to make a fine appearance, that they might attract attention and admiration. These affected ornaments were in themselves useless, and highly offensive to God, being proofs of hateful vanity and extravagance.

17 Therefore the LORD will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts.

The almighty God here declares, that he would punish these daughters of Zion in a manner suited to the crimes they committed, by removing their favourite objects, and exposing them to poverty, shame, and contempt. Their heads, which they were accustomed to dress at much expence, with great attention and elegance, and to adorn with various ornaments, of which they were extremely fond, God threatens to smite with a disease, which must have proved a very grievous calamity, especially to persons of the above description. Thus the Most High, who hateth the proud, wounded the head of those who went on in their trespasses, at the time they were led captive by their enemies into a foreign land.—At the same period, the latter part of this verse was likewise verified. It was anciently the barbarous custom of conquerors to strip their captives naked, to expose them to the inclemency of the weather, and the intolerable heat of the sun in warm climates. This, to women who had indulged themselves in the elegancies of life, and superfluities of dress, must have been a heavy calamity, and distressing in the extreme. Such was the punishment God threatened to inflict upon the delicate daughters of Zion, for their pride and haughtiness; of which they had woful experience at the Babylonish captivity.

18 In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of *their* tinkling ornaments *about their feet*, and *their* cauls, and *their* round tires like the moon,

19 The chains, and the bracelets, and the mufflers,

20 The bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the head-bands, and the tablets, and the ear-rings.

21 The rings, and nose-jewels,

22 The changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping-pins,

23 The glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils.

Suffice it for us to have read over this inventory of the Hebrew womens drefs, of which God threatened to deprive them. The antiquity and variety of these ornaments render our acquaintance with them very imperfect; and to endeavour to describe them would rather serve to gratify vain curiosity, and to amuse an idle fancy, than to convey useful instruction and improvement to the heart. I beg leave, therefore, to pass them over in silence, after I have made two or three short remarks.—The names of the several articles here mentioned, not occurring in any other passage of scripture, interpreters have been difficulted how to translate them, and to ascertain with precision what was the particular thing signified by each description. Nor does this afford just ground of surprize, when we consider the frequent alterations of fashions, and that the names of particular pieces of drefs are continually varying.—Though God threatened to take away from the daughters of Zion the ornaments here enumerated, we ought not from hence to conclude, that the wearing of them is unlawful to persons of high station, and considerable affluence.

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The extravagant use of them is doubtless condemned by the threatening before us; and the abuse of them, to the bad purposes of gratifying pride, vanity, and levity, is represented in a very strong light, demanding our serious attention.—A difference in dress ought certainly to take place among the several classes of mankind, and this difference ought to be somewhat proportioned to their various circumstances and conditions in life. People of every rank should remember, that they ought not to allow the expence laid out in purchasing articles like those above mentioned, to encroach on what they should appropriate to more important purposes, and the assistance of the poor; nor to allow the time of dressing with such ornaments, to intrench upon that which ought to be devoted to the far more noble designs of cultivating the heart, and beautifying the mind. We suppose, gross inattention to these material circumstances to have been one reason, why the divine displeasure discovered itself in the manner here foretold; and recorded for our admonition, upon whom are come the ends of the world.

24 And it shall come to pass, *that* in stead of sweet smell, there shall be stink; and in stead of a girdle, a rent; and in stead of well-set hair, baldness; and in stead of a stomacher, a girding of sackcloth; *and* burning in stead of beauty.

In these words the prophet describes farther calamities which God would inflict upon the haughty daughters of Zion.—They had been accustomed to use perfumes, of which they had no doubt great abundance and variety in those warm Eastern countries: hence frequent mention is made of them in the Song of Songs. Instead of the fine agreeable flavour of sweet perfumes, to which for long time they had been inured, the Hebrew ladies were to be punished in a manner most mortifying to their delicacy, by a disagreeable stench, arising from loathsome diseases, and the
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the medicines they should be obliged to use in order to mitigate and remove them. Instead of embroidered girdles, fine-dressed hair, ornamented stomachers, and admired beauty, their clothes should be rent, their heads should be bald, their loins girded with sackcloth, and their skin sun-burnt, through the intense heat to which they should be exposed. In few words, their condition was to be totally reversed: in room of all their delicacies, of which they were to be deprived, they were to be exposed to innumerable hardships, in so much that all might see their sin in their punishment.—This is one of those things, my friends, which happened for our ensample, and is written for our instruction. Let all, especially the female sex, who are in opulence and higher rank, be admonished of the danger of spending their money on frivolous articles of dress, and occupying their time in a studious attention to the niceties of fashion, lest, partaking with the Hebrew ladies in their sin, they share also in their punishment.

25 Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war.

This verse mentions another dreadful calamity which was to befall the daughters of Zion, or rather Zion itself, the form of address being changed from the plural to the singular number.—She was to experience the direful effects of war, in the destruction of her nobles and mighty men, who were her strength and her glory. The sword here intended, was that of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, whereby the land of Judah was laid waste from the one end to the other, and its inhabitants destroyed. The sword of that powerful monarch made no distinction of persons: it reached not only to the people, but to all the princes of Israel, the most honourable, and the most powerful not excepted. The sons of Zedekiah were slain before his eyes: the princes, the nobles, and the mighty

mighty men, as well as the common soldiers, fell in battle, through the rage and power of the enemy, who spared neither the great nor the mighty; so universal was the judgment God executed upon the Jewish nation, according to the predictions we have been considering.

26 And her gates shall lament and mourn, and she *being* desolate, shall sit upon the ground.

Zion is here represented as a desolate widow, mourning over her destitute condition.—Mourning is ascribed to her gates, which were the chief places of concourse, and thronged by the multitudes, which were going into, and returning from the city. Thither men, women, and children resorted, according to divine command, that they might hear, and learn to fear the Lord their God, and observe to do all the words of his law. There sat the judges, who determined the causes which were brought before them for decision by the people. Few now remained to frequent these gates; and these few should bitterly lament the deplorable condition to which they were reduced by the calamities of war, which had laid waste both city and country.—In these desolate circumstances, *she shall sit upon the ground*, which was a posture that signified sorrow, and deep distress. In this pensive manner the royal psalmist describes the Jews lamenting their captivity; ‘By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion*.’ And those who were left behind in the gates of Zion, were likewise to bewail their misery; of which the prophet Jeremiah hath given this moving representation; ‘Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars; her king and her princes are among the Gentiles; the law is no more, her prophets also find no vision from the Lord. The

* Psal. cxxxvii. 1.

‘ elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground,
‘ and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their
‘ heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth;
‘ the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to
‘ the ground. Mine eyes do fail with tears; my
‘ bowels are troubled; my liver is poured upon the
‘ earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my
‘ people *. O Lord, true and righteous are thy
‘ judgments. My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I
‘ am afraid of thy judgments.’

* Lam. ii. 9, 10, 11.

PRELIMI-

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

SUCH is the wickedness of mankind, and the extreme difficulty of reclaiming them from error and sin, that a considerable part of revelation is employed in shewing sinners their transgressions, and in warning them of their danger. Such is the infinite goodness, and amiable compassion of God, who delights in exercising loving-kindness and tender mercy on the earth, that, having reprov'd and threaten'd the workers of iniquity, he never fails to speak comfortably to his peculiar people, and to animate them by the most precious promises. In the midst of deserved wrath God always remembers mercy; and having denounced the most awful threatenings against transgressors, he follows them with reviving prospects, to refresh the disconsolate minds of his faithful servants. This obvious remark is verified in the prophetic discourse before us, where the inspired writer passes from the many calamities he had been representing, to describe the most substantial blessings to be enjoyed by the people of God, after the judgments above mentioned had been executed. The magnificent appearance of an illustrious person is here foretold, under whose benign influence the church of God was to shine forth in the beauties of holiness, and to enjoy the agreeable care and protection of divine providence.

 CHAP. IV.

AND in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.

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The division of the scriptures into chapters hath been made very injudiciously in some places, and in such a manner as sometimes interrupts the sense of several passages both of the Old and New Testament. A striking instance of the truth of this remark, which hath been often repeated, lies now before us. Our prophet's discourse is broken off almost in the middle of a sentence, by separating this verse from the preceding chapter, with which it is intimately connected. The dismal consequences of what is there related, are here described; namely, the great scarcity of men, occasioned by the vast numbers who had been slain in battle. At the period to which this prediction refers, the disproportion of the males to the females must have been very considerable, when seven of the latter should take hold on one of the former sex, and, laying aside their natural modesty, should address themselves to the men with the most pressing importunity, in order to obtain their consent to marry them; and, disregarding the suspicions arising from jealousy, declare they would be content with a share in the rights of marriage.

We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel. The warm solicitations of the women proceeded not so much from a love of ease and pleasure, enjoyed in the marriage-relation, or a desire of participating in the advantages resulting from it, as from a solicitude to share in the honour resulting from that connection. They were willing to renounce all claim to food and raiment, which married women commonly make on their husbands, and to provide for themselves according to their ability.—*Only let us be called by thy name.* A person is called by the name of another, that he may be distinguished from others, by the connection in which he stands to him whose name he bears: thus David is called the son of Jesse; Sarah, the wife of Abraham; and in this sense the women here mentioned, were desirous to be known by their relation to their common husband.—*To take away our reproach.* As it has al-

ways been reckoned honourable for a woman to be desired and loved by the men, so to be neglected and overlooked hath been ever esteemed a dishonour and a reproach. It must be so; for by the law of nature, and by divine constitution, the man is the covering and honour of the woman with whom he is connected, and by whom she hopes to see her own offspring, whom she considers as her greatest treasure. The celibacy of young women, therefore, is classed, by Asaph, among the calamities which befell the people of Israel: ‘ Their maids were not given in marriage*.’ Such was the deplorable condition of Judah, after the terrible slaughter made among them by the Assyrians, as appears from what is recorded, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17. where we read, ‘ That the king of the Chaldees slew their young men with the sword, in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age.’ On this account the virgins of Jerusalem are described, by the prophet Jeremiah, as hanging down their heads to the ground with sorrow †.—Let us then, my friends, adore the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, who, in his kind providence, commonly proportions the number of males and females, so that, as he himself directs, every man may have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. And when we hear of the dreadful desolations made upon mankind by the sword, and their lamentable consequences, let us cautiously avoid those transgressions which expose to such awful judgments, and endeavour to be thankful to God for the inestimable blessings of peace.

2 In that day shall the BRANCH of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.

* Psal. lxxviii. 63.

† Lam. ii. 10.

In that day. This expression must not be interpreted here in its strict and literal signification, but in its enlarged and more extensive meaning; in which sense it is often used in prophetic language. Thus in Hosea ii. 15. where God speaks comfortably to Israel, he promises, ‘to give her, her vineyards from
‘ thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope,
‘ and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth,
‘ and as in the day when she came up out of the
‘ land of Egypt.’ The Hebrew words, as some writers have observed, may be translated *after that time*, which seems to be the true meaning of the expression. The prophet does not foretel what should come to pass immediately after the return of Israel from captivity; but passing over in silence intermediate events, and looking forward by the spirit of prophecy, he is enabled to describe the felicity of the people of God in the time of the Messiah; though, at first view, he may appear to treat only of Zerubbabel, who typified our Saviour in some respects.

The branch of the Lord, is a figurative description of the great Messiah, whom the prophet Zechariah, (who frequently alludes to the prophecies before us), plainly informs us, is the person intended by this character, ‘Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I
‘ bring forth my servant the Branch*.’ And again,
‘ Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the
‘ man whose name is the Branch, and he shall grow
‘ up out of his place, and he shall build the temple
‘ of the Lord †.’ By this title he is foretold by Isaiah, in this passage, and in Chap. xi. 1. The same designation was given him by Jeremiah, in these remarkable words; ‘Behold, the days come, saith
‘ the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous
‘ branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and
‘ shall execute judgment and justice in the earth ‡.’ It must be evident to the impartial reader of these

* Zech. iii. 8.

† Zech. vi. 12.

‡ Jer. xxiii. 5.

prophetic scriptures, that they do not refer to Zerubabel, or to any other person than our glorious Redeemer, who, with respect to his human nature, sprung from the royal line of David, and root of Jesse; and who, in way of eminence, was called the Servant, and Branch of Jehovah, as he, in a manner peculiar to himself, proceeded forth, and came from God. Like a branch, his beginning upon this earth was small, his appearance was mean, his growth was progressive; for he grew up before God as a tender plant, waxing greater and greater, until his shadow filled the whole earth, and men reposed themselves under it with great delight, and found his fruits sweet unto their taste. On these accounts we conclude, that the promised Messiah is the person intended by the Branch of the Lord; which is here foretold,

Shall be beautiful and glorious; or, as you read in the margin of some of your Bibles, shall be beauty and glory. Beauty chiefly consists in the just proportion of the several parts which belong to the object to which it is ascribed: it also frequently denotes some peculiar excellence which attracts admiration and esteem. With the greatest propriety is beauty ascribed to the branch of the Lord, in as much as the illustrious person spoken of under this figure, is fully possessed of all those amiable excellencies which excite admiration and love, and displays them in their highest perfection in his person and performances. God is love, and whatever is lovely in him is to be seen in the express image of his person, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. The divine beauty of the Lord cannot be any where contemplated to such advantage as in the Branch of the Lord, nor can the attractive beauties of human nature be any where viewed shining with such lustre as in the righteous Branch, which God raised up unto David, who was altogether lovely, and fairer than the children of men; in contemplating whom, we ought to exclaim in the words of the admiring prophet, ‘How great is his goodness,

‘ness, how great is his beauty *!’—It is also foretold, that this branch shall be glorious. Glory consists in the splendour, pomp, and magnificence of the person to whom it belongs; and in this sense, I suppose, it is ascribed to the blessed Redeemer, who afforded the most wonderful manifestations of the divine presence, power, and goodness, in the redemption of sinners from among all nations. How incomparably grand were the exhibitions he gave of his grace and ability for effectuating this great end, first upon earth, and afterward from heaven! Having displayed in this world the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, he was exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high, from whence he gave forth the most convincing proofs of his grandeur and magnificence, for the benefit of his church. Thus we see this prediction eminently fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is indeed beautiful and glorious.—Let us ever highly esteem him, who from everlasting was the delight of the Almighty; who in every age is precious, is an honour to them that believe, and who is essentially necessary to our happiness and salvation.

And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely. By the fruit of the earth, we may understand, with some interpreters, the human nature of the Branch of the Lord, which was derived from this earth. At the time to which this prophecy refers, it appeared incomparably excellent and comely, when it was rendered perfectly glorious, that it might be elevated to the throne of God, as the complete model after which the bodies of the living in Jerusalem shall at last be fashioned. What a magnificent description does the apostle John give, in the first chapter of the Revelation, of the view with which he was favoured of this illustrious Person! Or by the fruit of the earth, as others are of opinion, may be meant, the blessed effects resulting from the amiable aspect af-

* Zech. ix, 17.

fumed by the Branch of the Lord, and the consequent gift of the Holy Spirit, when the gospel was diffused through the earth, and the kingdom of God was established among men, who abounded in every divine grace and good work, which adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour. Then, as foretold, ‘The earth did yield her increase’ with the utmost profusion; ‘and God, even our own God, did bless us * :’ and our Lord’s observation was verified, ‘Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit †.’ How excellent and comely were the fruits which sprung up on earth, in consequence of the exaltation of Jesus Christ to his glory! How illustrious was the meekness displayed by his disciples, in patiently sustaining the many injuries they received, whilst they never offered any violence to others! How amiable that humility whereby they contemned worldly riches and grandeur, which commonly possess the hearts of mankind, and engage their most strenuous pursuits. How glorious was the fortitude and magnanimity they discovered, in their discourses and actions, in their afflictions and persecutions, by living in obedience to Jesus Christ, and dying for his testimony, who was despised and rejected of men! So excellent and comely were their fruits, that, in prosperity, they allured the world by the beauties of holiness; and, in affliction, they excited admiration by the splendour of their innocence, and their invincible patience.

For them that are escaped of Israel. These beautiful fruits of the earth greatly advanced the honour, the interest, and reputation of the happy persons who are here described, in reference to the escape made by some of the Jews, when the army of the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. At that time, in the day of the Lord’s anger, saith the prophet Jeremiah, ‘None escaped or remained †.’ These words are not to be

* Psal. lxxvii. 6.

† John xii. 24.

‡ Lam. ii. 22.

understood in their strictest sense; for he himself escaped, and others beside him: but he affirms, that very few escaped in comparison of those who suffered. Indeed, in midst of the most terrible judgments that were ever executed upon the children of men, God hath always remembered mercy, and some have escaped. When the old world was destroyed by water, Noah and his family were preserved; when Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed to ashes, Lot and his daughters had their lives given them for a prey; and when Jerusalem was made a spectacle of divine vengeance, some escaped the general calamity. To this the prophet seems evidently to refer in the words before us, which are descriptive of the same persons mentioned in the following verse, where we shall have opportunity of considering their character more particularly.—Let the wonderful Person of whom you have now heard, possess the chief place in your affection. He is infinitely lovely and glorious, and justly merits your highest esteem, and most profound respect. Abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are by him to the praise of God, and thankfully improve the fruits of the earth to the honour of the blessed Giver.

3 And it shall come to pass, *that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem.*

These words describe the distinguishing character, and peculiar property of the escaped in Israel, who participate in the salvation of the great Messiah.—The persons intended, are set forth as left in Zion, as remaining in Jerusalem, and as written among the living in Jerusalem. I shall endeavour to illustrate the latter of these expressions, so as to enable you to understand the two former. After the Lord had brought forth the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and house of bondage, he commanded them

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to be numbered: this was likewise done after their return from captivity at Babylon, as is evident from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The record in which their names were engrossed, is supposed to have been the writing of the house of Israel, mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of Ezra. To this practice there is a manifest allusion in the words of this verse, which may be considered as referring to those who were enrolled as inhabitants of Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judea, in the register kept for that purpose. This book might be called the book of life, or of the living, as it contained the names of all those who were alive in the city, and enjoyed the privileges of citizens. As the prophet, however, hath somewhat farther in view than the return of the Jews from their captivity, namely, the purity and felicity of the church of God, after the appearance of the Messiah, I suppose the expression is intended to include those who are written among the living, or to eternal life, in the Jerusalem which is above. In this sense it comprehends all those of whom Jesus Christ speaks, as having their ‘names written in heaven *;’ concerning whom the apostle Paul says, ‘Their names are in the book of life †;’ who, as the apostle John affirms, ‘are written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ‡.’ This glorious prerogative, peculiar to the people of God, is infinitely superior to that of having power over evil spirits: and forms a striking contrast to those who depart from God; concerning whom the prophet Jeremiah declares, ‘They shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters †.’ The city of the heavenly Jerusalem is frequently spoken of, as having a register belonging to it, in which the names of the citizens are written, who are born from above, made partakers of spiritual

* Luke x. 20.
 † Jer. xvii. 13.

† Philip. iv. 3.

‡ Rev. xiii. 8.

life, invested with right to eternal inheritance, and endeavour to act suitably to the distinguishing advantages they enjoy. These are the people who are here designed, and concerning whom it is foretold, that every one of them

Shall be called holy. The Hebrew word translated *holy*, is derived from one that signifies *to set apart, consecrate, or devote*. Those who are holy, the Lord hath set apart for himself, in his eternal purpose. In this sense he informed the prophet Jeremiah, ‘ Before I formed thee, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a prophet *.’ In consequence whereof, God is graciously pleased actually to consecrate them to himself, by preparing and qualifying them for the important services he assigns them. Thus we read, that Barnabas and Saul were separated for the work whereunto he called them †. The happy effect of this consecration is, that they sincerely devote, and heartily dedicate themselves to God; or, in the words of scripture, they give or yield themselves to the Lord, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God. In this manner they become vessels of honour, sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work ‡. Things such as silver and gold, when dedicated to God, only change their use, whilst they remain the same as formerly: whereas men, who are devoted to him, have their nature purified, as well as the purposes for which they are employed changed; their souls and bodies, their time and talents, are all used in the service of God, for the advancement of his glory. According to this prediction, the persons spoken of should be called holy: being truly and actually sanctified, they were to be known by the honourable designation of saints. Men who are often mistaken, are ready to misname persons and things: they are apt to call the proud happy; to call evil good, and good evil; and to bless the covetous, whom

* Jer. i. 5.

† Acts xiii. 2.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

the Lord abhorreth. In their pride of heart, they may say to others better than themselves, ‘Stand by, come not near, I am holier than thou:’ whereas God, who is infinite in knowledge, perfect in understanding, and whose judgment is according to truth, always gives persons their true and proper names; and, therefore, those whom he calleth holy, justly deserve this character.—This prediction was remarkably verified at the time the Branch of the Lord became beautiful and glorious, when, as we learn from the Acts and Epistles of the apostles, this was the distinguishing character of those who constituted the first churches of Jesus Christ.—I now address you in the words which the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, ‘Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’ Consider the holiness of God as the perfect pattern you ought to imitate, and a powerful motive to induce you to follow after this holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion; and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.

In this manner the honourable character, mentioned in the preceding verse, is to be attained.—That men may with propriety be called holy, their pollution must be washed away by him who alone can bring a clean out of an unclean thing. The expressions here used are metaphorical, and seem to refer to the way commonly taken in order to clean a church or city from the nastiness it hath contracted. The filth to be washed away from the daughters of Zion, was the notorious crimes committed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem; such as idolatry and superstition.

stitution, pride, luxury, and the like, joined with presumptuous self-confidence in their own righteousness, which notwithstanding they foolishly endeavoured to establish. By the blood of Jerusalem, may be meant the atrocious crimes of fraud and perjury, robbery and murder, with the cruel oppression of the poor, the fatherless, and the widow. These were to be washed away and purged by the Lord himself, whose glorious prerogative it is, to cleanse his people from all their iniquities, and to sprinkle clean water upon them, according to his promise, that they may be clean. This great change was to be effectuated by the spirit of judgment, which God was to confer upon the ministers and teachers of the Christian church, who, by their judicial proceedings and decisions, were to separate between the holy and profane. By the spirit of burning, may be meant those awful judgments which were to be inflicted on the Jewish nation, in that terrible day, which was to burn as an oven, wherein the Lord was to appear as a refiner's fire, and the blood of Jesus Christ and his apostles, shed about Jerusalem, was to be avenged. In consequence of which, the church of God, formed of his peculiar people, zealous of good works, should exclude from their society, all those who persisted in the practice of the above-mentioned and similar transgressions.—If internal purification is included in the expressions before us, whereby the people of God are cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, so as to perfect holiness in the fear of God, *the spirit of judgment* is that Spirit who judges and condemns men for their sins, by means of the law of God; who inspires them with spiritual knowledge and understanding in divine truths, and possesses them of wisdom and prudence to direct their ways. *And the spirit of burning* (an expression peculiar to this passage of scripture), may refer to the extraordinary gifts conferred upon the disciples of Jesus Christ at the day of Pentecost by the Holy Spirit, of which

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the cloven tongues, like as of fire, which sat upon them, were instructive emblems; or to his continued influence upon mens hearts, whereby he consumes their corruptions, purifies their souls unto obedience, warming them with divine love, and ardent zeal for good works.—Deeply impressed with a sense of the impurity of our natures, now stripped of their original beauty, and of the sinfulness of our actions, now tainted by pollution, let us earnestly apply to God, that he may wash us thoroughly from our iniquity; whilst we diligently improve the means he hath appointed, and often blessed, for accomplishing this salutary purpose.

5 And the LORD will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies a cloud, and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory *shall be* a defence.

This, and the following verse, represent the external happy condition of the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom, with some of the glorious prerogatives they were to enjoy, under the favour of divine providence.—The Lord, the self-existent and all-sufficient Jehovah, who is infinitely possessed of every divine perfection, the giver of all good, who cleanseth from all unrighteousness, asserts himself to be the author of the inestimable privileges here mentioned. These, he declares, he will convey by his creating power, whereby he calleth the things which are not as though they were, and forms them for his service, to display his glory.—The subjects to whom these important blessings are promised, are, *Every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and her assemblies.* Mount Zion here, as in many other prophecies, denotes the church of God, that he himself hath planted and established, which, like that mountain of old, is indeed beautiful, the joy of the whole earth; concerning which God hath said, 'This is my rest: here will I dwell, for I
' have

‘ have desired it *.’ By the dwelling-places of Zion, may be meant the habitations of the just, on which the blessing of God doth rest; the dwellings of the righteous, wherein are heard the voice of rejoicing and salvation. By their assemblies, may be intended the solemn meetings of her inhabitants, convened for the sacred purposes of divine worship, in which the name of God is recorded with honour, the word of God is preached with benefit, the presence of God is experienced with joy, his loving-kindness is thought of with delight, and his praises celebrated with gratitude. They are no other than the congregations of the saints, professing reverence and love for God, faith in Christ, and union with one another, assembled where with most convenience they may do homage to the one true God, through the one Mediator, by the one Spirit, in which they find their duty, honour, and happiness to consist. At the period referred to in this prophecy, they convened daily in the temple; they associated in an upper chamber, and went from house to house as circumstances required. And in after-times, the multitude of them that believed, and professed to believe, having greatly increased, they wisely provided places wherein they might assemble, for the social worship of the one common Lord and Saviour.—We, my brethren, compose one of these assemblies, to which the reviving promises in this, and the following verse, are given. Ever solicitous to enjoy the inestimable blessings they contain, let us frequently and devoutly associate ourselves, to give honour and glory to him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, in the firm persuasion, that the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies,

A cloud, and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night. As an eminent writer hath remarked, These words contain a gospel-promise, expressed

* Psal. cxxxii. 14.

in law-terms; a New-Testament mercy, in Old-Testament dress. They bear a manifest reference to what is written in the conclusion of the book of Exodus, where we are told: 'That a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.' Prior to the erection of that structure, the pillar of cloud conducted the children of Israel in their journeys by day, and by night a pillar of fire gave them light. After the tabernacle was finished, the cloud covered the tent of the congregation; and when the tabernacle was set aside, and the temple was dedicated, the cloud of the divine presence filled that magnificent house. And now under the gospel, the temple being set aside, and long ago buried in ruins, the Lord hath promised to create upon the assemblies of his saints a cloud, from which they derive all the important advantages which the people of God anciently enjoyed from the pillar of cloud and fire. The cloud and smoke by day, afforded the Israelites an instructive symbol of the divine presence which attended them: it conducted them in all their journeys, interposing between them and their enemies; it confounded the latter, whilst it conveyed direction to the former. By day, it served for a shadow, to screen them from the sultry heat of that warm climate. By night, it rendered the air healthy and agreeable: it proved a defence from numerous dangerous enemies, and yielded light for travelling, and preserving order and decency in the camp. In these, and other respects, the pillar of cloud and fire was an eminent type of the spiritual privileges comprehended in the promise under our consideration, made to the assemblies of Zion. They shall enjoy the presence of God; of which they are assured by the faithful and true Witness, who hath declared, 'That wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them *.' They shall be favoured with direction from

* Matth. xviii. 20.

the wonderful Counsellor, who will guide them in the ways of truth, and conduct them by his good Spirit into the land of uprightness*. They shall have protection from all their enemies, from their Redeemer, who is mighty; who will safely preserve them through the various conditions they have to pass, in the lightsome days of prosperity, and in the dark nights of adversity. Though the assemblies of Zion may not enjoy a light sufficiently strong, to enable them to see to the end of their journey, God will shew them their way, one step after another. Though he may not defend them from the attacks of their enemies, he will not allow them to fall a prey into their hands; and, by gradual conquests, he will carry them forward to complete victory. Though they may not always possess the consolations of the Holy Spirit, he will not leave or forsake them in any case.—Such seems to be the import of the promises here made to the assemblies of the people of God, and such is the substance of those glorious privileges his peculiar people were favoured with under the former dispensation. All these are continued with us, whilst the bondage, to which, for wise purposes, they were subjected, is happily removed. Our condition, in many respects, is greatly preferable to theirs: we have better promises, greater liberty, and more grace; and therefore let us highly value, and diligently improve our advantages, whilst we earnestly plead with God for the accomplishment of the promises he hath given for our encouragement.

For upon all the glory shall be a defence. Beside the pillar of cloud and fire, which attended the children of Israel in their journeys through the wilderness, a bright sensible display of the divine presence became visible to them on some occasions. When the tabernacle was erected, we are told, That a cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord filled it; and thus the

* Psal. cxliii. 10.

cloud above the tabernacle formed a covering, or defence, to the glory wherewith it was filled. To this there seems to be an allusion in the expression now before us. Or it may refer to the ark of the testimony, which was called the glory of Israel; for we read, that when it was taken by the Philistines, lamentation was made in these words; ‘The glory is departed from Israel*.’ With great propriety was this name given to the ark, as it contained the two tables whereon the law of God was written, which was intended to conduct men to Jesus Christ, who had that law written upon his heart;—the pot of manna, preserved by divine command, as a memorial of God having fed his people with bread from heaven, and a figure of the true bread of life, which giveth life unto the world;—and Aaron’s rod, which budded, in testimony of the divine displeasure against Korah and his company, who contended for the priesthood, signifying the order and government which ought to be maintained in the church of God. These things were deposited in the ark, which had for a covering the mercy-seat; typical of Jesus Christ, whose mediation serves as a covering to his people, and proves their sure defence. Such was the glory of the church under the Old Testament, which may assist us in ascertaining what is the glory under the New Testament here intended. Jesus Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega, under this dispensation, forms its highest glory: the God of glory resides in it as his habitation; the Spirit of glory resteth upon it, as his highly favoured dwelling-place; the law of God is preserved in her assemblies; the glorious gospel of the Son of God is their treasure and charter; and faithful ministers, the glory of Christ, are their messengers. All the genuine members of these assemblies are glorious within: they are clothed with the garments of salvation, and shine forth in the beauties of holi-

* 1 Sam. iv. 22.

ness, displaying the most amiable simplicity of manners, and unfeigned mutual love, in the exercises of well-doing.—Upon all this glory

Shall be a defence. The word translated *defence*, is derived from one that signifies *to cover*. In this sense it is used by the patriarch Jacob; who says concerning his son Benjamin, ‘The Lord shall cover him all the day long*.’ The word before us signifies *a covering*, and, by an easy transition, *a defence*, for which purpose a covering is frequently intended. The expression, as already hinted, alludes to the cloud which covered the tabernacle of old, wherein was the ark, the glory of Israel, which prefigured the true glory of the church. As that cloud formed a covering, or defence, upon the ark, so the almighty God, whose peculiar prerogative is to give existence to things which formerly had not a being, and to form things of pre-existent matter, which had not the least tendency to become what it is formed; in like manner, I say, the all-powerful God will create a defence upon his people’s glory. This defence shall be extended, in a peculiar manner, to their immortal spirits; for the Lord shall preserve them from all evil: he shall preserve their souls. Their bodies also are under his protection; for he keepeth all their bones, not one of them is broken. Over their reputation he likewise forms a defence; for thou, Lord, shalt keep them in secret as in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues. About their houses and possessions he maketh an hedge, in which there is not one gap through which an adversary may enter. ‘As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever †. No weapon formed against them,’ however sharp, and actively employed, ‘shall ever prosper ‡. Let all those then who put their trust in God, rejoice: let them ever shout for joy; because thou, Lord, de-

* Deut. xxxiii. 12.

† Psal. cxxv. 2.

‡ Isaiah liv. 17.

‘ fendeft them: let them alfo who love thy name, be
 ‘ joyful in thee. For thou, Lord, wilt blefs the righ-
 ‘ teous, with favour wilt thou compafs him as with a
 ‘ fhield*.’——Trust then in God at all times: ye
 people, pour out your hearts before him: God is a
 refuge: in the Lord is our defence. Among men
 the defence of their glory and privileges cofts very
 dear. That we may be protected by government,
 we fupport it with a confiderable portion of our
 property: whereas God is graciously pleafed to create
 a defence upon our higheft glory; and only requir-
 eth, that we ask his protection, trust in him for safe-
 ty, and ufe the means he hath prefcribed.

6 And there fhall be a tabernacle for a fhadow
 in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of
 refuge, and for a covert from ftorm and from rain.

The fubject introduced in the preceding verfe is
 here amplified.——Under the former difpenfation, the
 church enjoyed the privilege of a tabernacle, made
 by divine appointment, according to the pattern
 which God fhewed to Mofes in the Mount. After
 the children of Ifrael entered the wildernefs, and re-
 ceived the law from Mount Sinai, they were employ-
 ed in providing materials for this ftructure; which
 were curioufly wrought, and richly ornamented, by
 Bezaleel, under the infpection of the Jewifh lawgiver;
 who ordered every thing relative to its beauty, order,
 and ornaments, as the Lord commanded. The hiftory
 of its erection is the chief fubject of the latter part of
 the book of Exodus. This tabernacle was intended
 to be a vifible pledge of the prefence of God among
 that people, which conftituted their protection and de-
 fence, as we learn from the prayer prefented to God,
 at its removal from one place to another, recorded
 Numb. x. 35, 36. In this view, it proved the means
 of confirming the faith and hope of Ifrael in the di-

* Pfd. v. 11, 12.

vine presence, and powerful protection of Jehovah. It was the place appointed for the performance of all the ordinances of divine worship, where the book of the law was kept, where the people brought their offerings, and the priests presented them before the Lord in the manner they were directed. It was the sanctuary and dwelling-place of the Most High, where he met with his people, conversed with them, and sanctified them by his glory; which afforded them a powerful motive to awe and reverence for God, and to holiness and purity of conduct. Above all, it was chiefly designed to be a continual representation, and instructive type, of the Son of God's dwelling upon earth, in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man, as a glorious demonstration of his love and grace. In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead; through him all his peculiar people have access to God, with their spiritual sacrifices; from him they enjoy the most agreeable protection; and by him they have the most substantial proof of the love of God, which passeth knowledge. This is the true tabernacle, of which, we suppose, our prophet speaks, when he foretels, that it shall be

For a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain. The heat of persecution, which was to distress the church of Jesus Christ, at the period to which this prophecy looked forward, is doubtless the heat here meant. It arose from the intense hatred of the kings and princes of the earth, glowing with indignation against the disciples of the Son of God; and from the fiery darts of the evil one, which were directed against them. These things are very properly signified by the heat of the sun, which scorches those who are exposed to its penetrating rays without shadow or covering, especially in warm eastern countries. In like manner, those who are exposed to the heat of persecution, are harassed and tortured by instruments of cruelty, unless protected by some kind hand.—By the storm
and

and the rain may be intended, those awful divine judgments, and general calamities, such as war, famine, pestilence, and the like, whereby God corrects the nations, and chastens them for their sins. Like a storm, and a deluge of rain, they spread desolation and ruin wherever they fall, and are attended with many dreadful consequences. Hence the awful declaration, ‘ Upon
 ‘ the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone,
 ‘ and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion
 ‘ of their cup*.’ Alluding to the same metaphors, God, by the prophet Ezekiel, threatened to punish the land of Magog: ‘ And I will plead against him
 ‘ with pestilence and with blood, and I will rain upon
 ‘ him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people
 ‘ that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great
 ‘ hailstones, fire and brimstone. Thus will I magnify
 ‘ myself, and sanctify myself, and I will be known in
 ‘ the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that
 ‘ I am the Lord †.’—In such calamitous seasons it is foretold, that the great Messiah shall be for a shadow, a place of refuge, and a covert

In warm climates, where the scorching rays of the sun beat with great vehemence on the weary traveller, ready to faint with heat, a shadow is highly valued. Hence the Hebrew word translated *defence* (Numb. xiv. 9.), signifies also *a shadow*, as you see it rendered on the margin of some of your Bibles. The Son of God, by tabernacling among men, in human nature, interposed between them and the hot displeasure of the Almighty, which they had incurred by transgression.—This tabernacle is likewise foretold it shall be a place of refuge. The expression may allude to the cities of refuge, appointed under the law: of which we read, Numb. xxxv. 11.—14. These were erected, by divine appointment, upon conspicuous high grounds, where they might be seen at a great distance: they were to be so situated, that a person might reach one of them in a short time, from the

* Psal. xi. 6.

† Ezek. xxxviii. 22, 23.

most distant corner of the land: they were required to be cities of the Levites, from whom those who fled thither might enjoy the benefit of instruction: the roads leading to them were ordered to be made good; and stones set up, to give direction to those who resorted thither for protection. Such a place of refuge is the true tabernacle here spoken of, which is the only sufficient sanctuary from storm and rain. It was erected by divine appointment; and elevated, that it might draw all men unto it: thither men are commanded to flee for refuge: the way is clearly marked out in the gospel, by which the prisoners of hope are to turn to this strong-hold, where they are assured of instruction, which shall make wise unto salvation.—

These predictions received a partial accomplishment, in the peace and safety which the churches in Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and other places enjoyed, under the special protection of divine providence, and the extraordinary proofs with which they were favoured of God's gracious presence. And afterward, when the heat of persecution arose, Jesus Christ afforded comfortable shelter and defence to his church, and preserved it from those severe judgments which overturned the Jewish state. And blessed be God, that, in following ages, the church of Christ hath happily experienced the farther fulfilment of these promises, the completion of which we are still admitted to behold.—

Let us be deeply sensible of our need of these precious blessings: let us highly prize them, and earnestly seek to enjoy them. It is only those who are weary, that will seek rest: it is only those who see they are in danger, that will flee to a place of refuge: it is only they who are convinced a storm is approaching, that will look for shelter. Affected with a deep sense of the divine displeasure to which we are exposed by sin, let us have immediate recourse to Jesus Christ, repose ourselves under his refreshing shadow, and thankfully accept of the refuge and covert he affords from impending calamity and danger.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE discourse recorded in this chapter, stands unconnected with the preceding, and following ones. It was probably delivered toward the conclusion of the reign of Uzziah, after he had been struck with leprosy. It contains a figurative representation of the inestimable blessings which God had conferred upon his ancient people, their base ingratitude for his distinguishing favours, and the dreadful judgments which were to be inflicted upon them for their sins.—The prophet begins with describing the past, and future fortunes of Israel and Judah, under the figure of a vineyard, planted, cultivated, and defended by the kind providence of God, whose just expectations having been disappointed, after exercising long patience, he deprived them of the important advantages they enjoyed, and afterward destroyed and exterminated them. He then explains the metaphorical language he had used, and plainly points out the meaning of the parable he had delivered. After which, he recounts six enormous crimes to which the people of Israel and Judah were addicted; on account of which, he denounces so many terrible woes against them, involving many great calamities. The prophecy looks forward to the punishment inflicted upon Ephraim, by the Assyrians; and upon the Jews, first by the Babylonians, and afterward by the Romans: both which may be comprehended in the events foretold, whereby the predictions were verified.

 CHAP. V.

NOW will I sing to my well-beloved, a song of my beloved, touching his vineyard: My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.

Novo

Now will I sing; or, according to the Bishop of London's new translation, "Let me sing now a song." The Hebrew word translated *a song*, is often used in an extensive sense, to denote any elaborate composition, consisting of short sentences, designed for instruction or entertainment; though it more commonly signifies, any kind of verse, formed of certain select words, so arranged as to make an agreeable melody, or musical tone of the voice. A learned commentator observes *, That there are three kinds of songs or poems in the Hebrew scriptures; which he thus describes, and distinguishes from each other: The first are those which are written in rhyme, having similar corresponding sounds terminating the verses; each of which are composed of a certain number of syllables, forming a sort of metre, with the rules of which we are unacquainted. The second are verses in which the words are distributed according to number, quantity, and accent, so as to make an agreeable harmony, and musical melody, arising from the proportion and relation of different combined sounds; and were designed to have been sung either by the voice, or by instruments of music. Of this sort were the songs of Moses, Miriam, Deborah, and others. The third class is composed of allegorical and parabolical sentences, containing significant sayings of high importance, which, from the arrangement of words, and disposition of syllables, form a sort of verse, intended to improve the heart, to sanctify the life, and comfort the mind. Such is the Song of Songs, the song now before us, and those contained in the twelfth and twenty-sixth chapters of this prophecy.

Now will I sing to my well-beloved. The person to whom the prophet resolved to sing this song, he describes by the name of his well-beloved; to whom belonged the vineyard of the Jewish church, which is the subject of this song, or parable. This is no other

* Vitringa,

than the Lord of hosts, as is evident from the 7th verse of this chapter. This mighty Lord was the proprietor of this vineyard, under whose direction, inspection, and care, all its interests were managed: he was also the object of the prophet's supreme affection, the desire of all nations, the hope of Israel, the Lord whom they fought, the messenger of the covenant, in whom they delighted, and who is often intended by this description in the Song of Solomon. The author of the song before us, which was designed to be sung in honour of the God of Israel, is the Holy Spirit, by whom our prophet was inspired, and to whom the church is indebted for this valuable composition. Indeed we cannot celebrate his praises aright, or sing to his glory, unless he put a new song into our mouths, and suitable dispositions into our hearts; for we can give him only of his own, and serve him with what he is pleased to bestow.—The subject of the song is his vineyard: by which we are informed, at the 7th verse, is meant the house of Israel; comprehending the ten tribes, who were distinguished, by that name, from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who adhered to the family of David, whose kings were lineally descended from that illustrious prince. By substituting the church of Christ for the vineyard of Israel, the benefits conferred upon the one for the blessings enjoyed by the other, and the unsuitable returns of the former for the vile ingratitude of the latter, this scripture is made our own: nay, with more fulness and propriety may it now be applied to the substance, than it was of old to the shadow of good things to come.

My well-beloved hath a vineyard. The vine is a plant, which, when rightly cultivated, bears most excellent grapes; from which is extracted the best of all liquors, that, in the language of scripture, cheers the heart of God and man. A vineyard is a collection of vines planted in a field, where they may best enjoy the refreshing beams of the sun, and other advantages that
render

render them fruitful. By this similitude, the church of God, under the former dispensation, constituted of the Israelitish nation, is sometimes spoken of in scripture. Instances of this sort occur in the eightieth psalm; and in the twentieth chapter of Matthew, where our Lord speaks of it under the same figure. This vineyard was planted, when the posterity of the renowned patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were translated into the land of Canaan, separated from among other nations, set apart for a peculiar people unto God, and were committed to the care of God's dear Son, who took them into his management and protection. Vineyards were intended for the pleasure and benefit of their proprietors, who doubtless derived much satisfaction and advantage from the rich grapes they produced. In this respect, as well as others, they afforded an agreeable representation of the church under the Old Testament; in which were the pleasant plants of the men of Judah, in whom the Most High took particular pleasure, among whom he delighted to dwell, whilst his honour and glory were made great in their salvation. These, from time to time, produced the precious fruits whereby God and man are delighted; such as faith and love, hope, patience, and obedience to the divine commandments. This was the vineyard of the well-beloved Son of God, who omitted nothing that could promote its fruitfulness. He planted it on

A very fruitful hill, which gave it all the advantage it could enjoy from situation. On the margin of some of your Bibles, the Hebrew words are translated *a horn of the son of oil*. The expression is highly figurative; and describes the land of Canaan as a horn, because it was reckoned to be higher than the neighbouring countries, as the horn is higher than the body of the animal—and the son of oil, because it was a land which abounded in oil, milk, and honey, with the other comforts of life. According to both these interpretations, the words strongly represent the elevated

situation, and vast fertility of the land of Israel. In respect of form or shape, it was crooked and high; stretching from the desert of Arabia on the south, bending toward the north, it went as far as the land of Palestine on the east. With regard to fruitfulness, the land of Canaan far excelled any country with which we are acquainted; for the children of Israel reaped their sixty, and their hundred folds. It must have been so; otherwise a country of similar extent to the principality of Wales, to which it hath been compared for size, could not have sustained so many hundred thousands of people, who carried on but little commerce with neighbouring nations. On account of its fertile soil, and luxuriant crops, it is frequently celebrated in scripture. By this consideration, Moses recommended to the Israelites obedience to the commandments of the Lord: ‘For the Lord thy God
 ‘bringeth thee into a good land; a land of brooks of
 ‘water, of fountains, and depths that spring out of
 ‘valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley,
 ‘and vines, and fig-trees, and pomegranates; a land
 ‘of oil-olive, and honey; a land wherein thou
 ‘shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack
 ‘any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and
 ‘out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.’ This then was the first benefit here mentioned, which God conferred upon his vineyard. He planted it in a very fruitful hill.—This circumstance ought to remind us, my brethren, of the kindness of God, in giving us the good land in which we dwell for a possession; which, though far inferior to Canaan in fruitfulness, is, in many respects, preferable to most countries. Sensible of the powerful obligations we are hereby brought under, let us bring forth fruit unto God, and endeavour to behave in a manner suited to the important advantages we enjoy.

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest
 vine,

vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

These words describe other external benefits, which God conferred upon the vineyard of his church.— He inclosed it with a fence, which served to mark its boundaries, to distinguish it from neighbouring countries, to prevent the hand of fraud or violence from hurting it, and to hinder its rapacious enemies from injuring the vines. The land of Israel was encompassed with excellent natural fences: on the west lay the Mediterranean sea; on the east was the river Jordan, the sea of Galilee, and the Dead sea; on the south were the deserts of Arabia, and the mountains of Idumea; and on the north was a ridge of mountains, called Antilibanus. All these, however, would have proved no better than bowing walls, and tottering fences, to guard its inhabitants, had not the Almighty superadded the protection of his kind providence. He himself, his favour, and power, were their sure defence; for he was not only the glory in the midst of them, but a wall of fire round about them. He appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks, as was often sung in the land of Judah. Such was the wonderful, constant protection which God afforded his people Israel, that, during the three solemn festivals, of the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, when all the males went up to Jerusalem, and the whole land might have become an easy prey to the nations around them, God preserved their country in safety, and permitted not the neighbouring kingdoms to invade their possessions. And that no advantage derived from a complete fence might be wanting to his vineyard, he gave to Israel the ceremonial law, that wall of partition, which separated them from all other people of the world, and kept them from incorporating with them. He gave them also the moral law, which in-

structed

structed them in the duty they owed to God, and to one another; and served as an excellent mean to retain them within proper bounds in their whole conduct. I may add, that the judges, princes, and rulers, whom God raised up among them, were the useful instruments of preserving them in order and safety.— Let us recollect with gratitude, the defence which God hath formed around us as a people, and the church he hath planted among us, whereby he hath in mercy guarded us from innumerable dangers, and protected us from our powerful enemies; whilst he hath favoured us with his law and gospel, and, in many important respects, put a difference between us and neighbouring nations. These distinguishing favours ought to excite us to be fruitful in every good work.

And gathered out the stones thereof. That a vineyard, or garden, be properly formed and cultivated, a fence must not only be put around it, but the stones, which would mar its beauty, spoil the growth of the vines, and prevent its fruitfulness, must also be gathered out. This necessary benefit God likewise bestowed upon his church of old. In the figurative sense, in which this song must be explained, the gathering out the stones here mentioned, may denote the expulsion of the idolatrous nations which dwelt in Canaan, prior to the time in which the Israelitish church was planted in that land. These obdurate people had been insensible to the revelations of the wrath of God against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men: they had remained unaffected with the blessings of his goodness, who gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; and when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful: they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and beasts, and creeping things; and therefore were significantly represented by the stones of the field. Had these people been
suffered

suffered to remain among the Israelites, they must have greatly spoiled the beauty of their church, obstructed its increase, and hindered its fruitfulness. They would have proved a snare to the posterity of Abraham, wherein they might have been entangled; and, by their idolatrous and vicious practices, that highly favoured nation might have been seduced from their obedience to God, into criminal customs, and bad habits. This is plainly intimated in the pathetic discourse which Moses delivered to them, recorded Deut. iv. To this figurative description of the Heathen our Saviour perhaps alluded, in the answer he gave to some of the multitude, who asked him to rebuke his disciples*.——This benefit, which was remarkably conferred upon the church under the Old Testament, in the days of Joshua, and afterward still more eminently in the reign of David, is likewise enjoyed under the present dispensation. In the scriptures of truth, all hypocrites, all who know not God, and obey not the gospel, are expressly excluded from the church of Jesus Christ; and, in due time, a complete separation shall be made between the righteous and the wicked.

And planted it with the choicest vine. However excellent the situation of a vineyard, though it be well laid out, and highly improved, yet if planted with bad vines, all the labour and expences will be in great measure lost. The chief excellence, therefore, of a vineyard, consists in its being planted with the best vines. Accordingly this circumstance is here particularly mentioned. God planted his church of old with a noble vine, and wholly a right seed: he enriched his vineyard with the choicest vines. He pitched upon Abraham, his friend, as the stock from whom, through his rich blessing, and kind providence, there sprung shoots in number, as the stars in heaven, and the sand by the sea-shore. There was

* Luke xix. 40.

indeed no intrinsic, superior excellence in this great patriarch, or his descendents, but what was the gift of the Father of lights, who made them to differ; whose choice rendered them choice vines; and who, contrary to nature, grafted them into the true vine, from whence, deriving nourishment, they became good and fruitful. Among that generation of Israel whom Joshua introduced into the land of Canaan, and planted in it, there were many illustrious persons, who were eminent for faith and holiness; and who gave memorable proofs of obedience to God, of whose mighty acts they had been witnesses, and of whose bounty they had largely participated. Incorporated by excellent laws, distinguished by peculiar privileges, and honoured with conspicuous marks of divine approbation, this vineyard is justly said to have been planted with the choicest vine.—In this respect, what is here said of the Old Testament church, afforded only a faint representation of the felicity of the church under the New Testament, at the head of which stands Jesus Christ, the true vine; with his branches, the apostles, and their numerous renowned followers, who were filled with the fruits of righteousness. Upon us then the benefit here mentioned, hath been conferred in a more eminent degree than upon Israel of old; and, by this circumstance among others, we are brought under the strongest obligations to bring forth fruit unto God.

And built a tower in the midst of it. This is the fifth benefit which the prophet here mentions, as having been bestowed upon the church of old. Towers were anciently erected in vineyards, as places of defence against the hostile attacks of enemies: they were intended to be the residence of those who kept them: they served as ornaments to the vineyards, and conduced to the pleasure of their proprietors. By the tower, which God is here said to have built in the church of Israel, may be meant, the city of Jerusalem, which

which served the same purposes to them as a tower to a vineyard. That famous city was remarkable for being a place of great strength and security, as appears from the descriptions given of it in scripture, and the attempts of the many powerful enemies which it resisted. The kings of Israel, and their counsellors, who were the guardians of the public safety, resided there: the prophets, and the priests also, to whom was committed the inspection of the vineyard, had likewise their residence in this metropolis. It was a great ornament to the Israelitish nation, renowned for its beauty and situation, the joy of the whole earth, wherever its fame had reached. In its palaces God was known for a refuge. ‘ For lo, the kings were ‘ assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, ‘ and so they marvelled, they were troubled, and ‘ hastened away *. It was the place wherein God put his name, in which he delighted to dwell, upon which his eyes and his heart were fixed continually for good; and when, in his good pleasure, he built up the walls thereof, he was pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offerings, and whole burnt-offerings, which were offered upon his altar. On these, and other accounts, we suppose, that the city of Jerusalem, which was thought to be situated near the midst of the land of Canaan, was the tower which God built in the vineyard of his ancient church.—Corresponding to this privilege, we, under the New Testament, enjoy advantages equal, yea, greatly superior to those which Israel derived from their famous metropolis.

And also made a wine-press therein. This is the sixth, and last-mentioned advantage which the church anciently enjoyed: the others, passed over in silence, may be supposed, or included, in those which are expressed. I imagine every vineyard hath commonly a wine-press made in it, or near it, for squeezing and ex-

* Psal. xlviii. 1. et seq.

tracting the wine from the grapes. In allusion to this practice, the blessed God is here said to have made a wine-press in the vineyard of his church, that he might therein collect the fruits of his vineyard, and all that praise and glory which he justly expected to receive. Learned men are divided in opinion respecting what is here intended by the wine-press. Some have thought, that the altar was thereby signified, upon which the blood of sacrifices, and drink-offerings of wine, were poured out; others have contended, that the prophets were thereby represented, whom God sent unto his people, to press them, by their instructions and example, to the exercises of true religion and virtue. I rather suppose, that the temple of Jerusalem was signified by the wine-press, in which the assemblies of Israel were convened: the fruits of faith, of righteousness, and obedience, were, in some measure, collected and expressed in the sacrifices, the prayers, and praises, which were therein presented to the Most High. This beautiful edifice was a kind of public repository, in which all the gifts and graces of God's people were expressed in the most becoming manner, in obedience to Jehovah, and to his glory. The tribes of Israel, who went up thither, were strongly urged to the exercise of devout affections, and good conduct, whereby the public benefit was promoted, and their own fruitfulness demonstrated.—Under the better dispensation, with which we are favoured, Jesus Christ affords us many greater prerogatives than those which were enjoyed in the temple by the posterity of Abraham.—Such were the important advantages which God was pleased to confer upon the vineyard of his ancient church. Let us not over-rate, nor envy their privileges. The blessings we enjoy are far more excellent than the benefits they possessed. Deeply impressed then with a grateful sense of God's distinguishing goodness, let us diligently improve it, for animating us to the faithful performance of every good work.

And

And he looked that it should bring forth grapes. After so much had been done for the vineyard, the great Lord of all justly expected, that it would have yielded good fruit in great abundance. The event however proved otherwise. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning. From everlasting he had a full view, and perfect knowledge of all the events of time; and therefore, strictly speaking, he never finds any thing different from what he clearly foreknew would certainly come to pass. Notwithstanding, disappointment of expectation is here ascribed to God, respecting the consequences of the care and kindness he had shewn to his church. The expression is used in condescension to the weakness of our capacities, and must be understood so as to be consistent with the infinite perfection of the divine nature, and the glorious attributes of Jehovah. Men who are attentive to their vineyards, and bestow much care and expence upon their cultivation, naturally expect fruits in some measure proportioned to their labour and charges, and would not be a little disappointed did they prove otherwise. You who are husbandmen, entertain the pleasing hope, that, in the weeks of approaching harvest, you shall be abundantly recompensed for all the cost and toil you have laid out upon your fields. In like manner, the blessed God looks for fruit from the vineyard of his church, suited to the many advantages they have enjoyed; and, in this prospect, he exercises much long-suffering toward them. This expectation, you must acknowledge, is just and reasonable, according to the well-known rule of equity, 'To whom much is given, much will be required.' The proper effects, however, the desirable consequences of the divine kindness and care, could not be discerned in the vineyard of Israel.—

Would to God that, in this respect, we may bear them no resemblance: but, being planted in the house of the Lord, let us still bring forth fruit, to shew that the

Lord is upright, he is our rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

And it brought forth wild grapes. Instead of the good fruits of righteousness, which tend to the glory of God, and comfort of men, the Israelitish church produced only wild grapes, the fruits of corrupt nature. They entertained wrong sentiments concerning the ways of God, particularly respecting the way by which they might have become righteous before him. ‘They followed after the law of righteousness, but did not attain to it; because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone*.’ False notions of the great promised Messiah, of the rites they were commanded to observe, and the sacrifices which they offered, were exceedingly prevalent among them. They indulged corrupt affections: they were addicted to all manner of vice and wickedness; such as idolatry, pride, oppression, and injustice, which they practised under the cloak of a high profession. They rebelled against God: ‘they despised his judgments, and walked not in his statutes, but polluted his sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols †.’ Hence the heavy charge which God brought against them, by the prophet Jeremiah, ‘I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me ‡?’ Their best performances were no better than wild grapes, and the clusters of Gomorrah, which, though outwardly beautiful, were putrid and useless. On the part of God, no care or pains was wanting: but so strong was the corruption of Israel, that it abused the divine goodness, and turned the grace of the Most High into wantonness: very great was the disproportion between the means employed for their improvement, and the end thereby accomplished.—Have not we, my brethren, foolishly acted over, in

* Rom. ix. 31, 32.

† Ezek. xx. 16.

‡ Jer. ii. 21.

some measure, their criminal conduct, by the ungrateful returns we have made to the Giver of all good for his distinguishing kindnesses. Ashamed of our past unfruitfulness, let us henceforth have our fruit unto holiness, that, in the end, we may obtain everlasting life.

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.

The ungrateful, unprofitable people, with whom God was at variance, are here constituted judges by supreme authority, and invited to decide the cause depending between the God of Israel and themselves, respecting the reasonableness and justice of the divine expectations.—Such is the perfect righteousness and equity of the divine procedure, and such his wonderful condescension, that he not only permits sinners to plead their cause before him, but, suspending as it were his sovereign rights, he offers to plead before the transgressors, to account for his conduct, and to submit to the judgment of his creatures. Similar instances of this astonishing grace are mentioned in scripture: a remarkable one is recorded in the first part of the sixth chapter of the prophecies of Micah; ‘Hear ye now what the Lord saith, ‘Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and ‘let the hills hear thy voice,’ &c. The Almighty, by acting in this manner, obligeth sinners to condemn themselves, and to pronounce their own sentence; of which I will mention two memorable examples, serving to illustrate this remark. When the Lord sent Nathan the prophet, to represent to David his criminal conduct, David was necessitated, by the message he received, to pronounce sentence upon himself; as you may see by consulting the twelfth chapter of Second Samuel. Our blessed Saviour, by a parable, resembling the one before us, so accurately described the character and conduct of the rulers of the Jews, that they were compelled to condemn themselves: ‘When
‘therefore

‘ therefore (said Jesus Christ) the lord of the vineyard
 ‘ cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?
 ‘ They say unto him. He will miserably destroy those
 ‘ wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto
 ‘ other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits
 ‘ in their seasons *. In the verse under consideration,
 the Lord our God called upon the inhabitants of the
 highly favoured city Jerufalem, and the men of Judah,
 to whom he had granted many inestimable privi-
 leges, to judge between him and them; in doing
 which, justice and equity would constrain them to
 decide against themselves. Never was such a cause
 heard before any judges. Never was a court con-
 cerned in a matter of such magnitude. Never were
 such parties heard at the bar of any tribunal: on the
 one part, the God of the whole earth, before whom
 all nations are less than nothing, and vanity; and, on
 the other part, sinful dust and ashes, guilty creatures,
 a backsliding people. Never was a subject of such
 extent and consequence agitated before any judgment-
 seat, it being no less than the whole conduct of the
 great Lord of all toward his church, and the whole
 behaviour of the church toward him.—To you, my
 friends, whom God hath favoured with many signal
 advantages, he now appeals for your decision upon
 his kindneses toward you, and your ingratitude and
 misimprovement. He will always be justified when
 he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth; and before
 him every mouth must be stopt, and all the world be-
 come guilty. Judge then righteous judgment: suffer
 not foolish prejudices, or partiality to yourselves, to bias
 your decision; but declare plainly, what, in sound rea-
 son, are your sentiments upon the subject of contro-
 versy; and if your determination be just, it must be
 for God, and against yourselves.

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore

* Matth. xxi. 40, 41.

when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?

In these words, God as it were brings an action against his ungrateful professing people.—He speaks as one confident of the goodness of his cause; and contends, that he had not omitted to afford his church every advantage necessary to render it fruitful. Do you reply, or think it might have been replied, to the inquiry here made, that he, for whom all things are possible, could easily, by the power of his victorious grace, have converted the men of Judah from the error of their ways; otherwise people can frustrate the grace of God, and make it of none effect; else God had not done all to his vineyard that could have been done in it? We affirm, that men cannot render the grace of God of none effect. Do you seriously think, that the almighty God cannot effectually convert sinners from the error of their ways; that he hath not power to give them new hearts; that he is unable to write his laws upon their inward parts; and that, having promised these, and other similar blessings, his success entirely depends upon the varying inclinations, and capricious humours of men? You must be sensible, that, by such a supposition, you ascribe the glory of sinners conversion not to God, but to themselves: you err, not knowing the scriptures, which uniformly attribute this happy change to him who worketh all in all; and you err, not knowing the power of God, which can easily surmount every obstacle that might hinder men from returning to the Most High. Notwithstanding the power of Jehovah could have easily effectuated a universal blessed change in the church of Israel, there appears great propriety and justice in the inquiry before us, when understood, as it ought, not in an absolute and unlimited, but in a confined and restricted sense. No doubt God could have done much more for the improvement of that people than he actually performed

performed under the Old Testament : he could have given them eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to love him : he could have given them his Spirit, and caused them to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments, and do them. There is, however, a peculiar force and energy in the question here put, which we will more clearly perceive, by recollecting the character of the persons to whom it was originally directed. A few excepted, who were Jews inwardly, whose circumcision was that of the heart, in the spirit, they were a carnal and self-righteous people, the servants of corruption, and insensible of their need of divine grace, to effectuate their conversion to God. To convince them of their inability to return to God, and the insufficiency for this purpose of all external means and advantages, God requires them to say, What could have been done more for his vineyard ? What other means, subservient to their salvation, and necessary to promote their happiness, suited to the dispensation under which they lived, could they have wished to enjoy, beside those with which they were favoured. The Lord their God had put them in possession of a good land ; he had exterminated from before them the Canaanites ; he had given them good laws ; he had raised up among them great men, for their defence ; he had sent his servants, the prophets, to instruct them ; he had instituted among them the solemn services of his worship ; he had erected for them a most magnificent temple, the admiration of the world ; he had multiplied to them his favours ; and chastized them for their sins, with many severe judgments. Could any thing more have been done, to render them fruitful in good works, beside giving them the Holy Spirit, the necessity of whose influence they were unwilling to acknowledge.—This subject presents us with an affecting instance of the weakness and depravity of human nature, which cannot be cured by the best means appointed for this end, unless accompanied with the grace of the Holy Spirit,
which

which God is ever ready to bestow upon those who, convinced of their own impotence, humbly and earnestly ask it of him.

Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? The blessed God here describes his conduct toward his church after the manner of men; who, having cultivated their vineyards, expect that the fruits should, in some measure, correspond to the great care and expence with which they have been attended, and are consequently much disappointed when it proves otherwise. Though the great Lord of all perfectly knew that he was not to receive adequate returns for the benefits he had conferred, he is nevertheless represented as looking for the fruits of his kindness and care, in the obedience of his people; to remind them of his constant inspection, his just expectation, and his high displeasure at their unprofitableness. This momentous circumstance I endeavoured to illustrate, when treating the second verse, where it likewise occurred; and therefore I think it unnecessary to say more on the subject at present, than to recommend it to your serious practical regard. In the parable of the fig-tree, delivered by our Saviour, recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Luke, from the sixth verse, the great God is represented as looking for fruit: when he findeth none, he is justly offended; and, after some time, he ordered it to be cut down. This presents us with a just view of what will be our certain doom, if, when God looks for faith, he observes unbelief; for repentance, and beholds presumption; for love, and seeth hatred; for patience only, and lo murmuring; for reformation, and instead thereof backsliding; for fruit, and nothing to be found but leaves. If such is our unhappy condition, what, what can we expect, but that when we cry to God for mercy, we find none; when we wish for light, behold darkness; when we desire peace, behold trouble; when we look for good, evil cometh; and when we expect success, behold disappointment? Per-
mit:

mit me then to address you, in the words of the apostle Peter, ‘ Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ *.

5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up: *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down.

In this, and the following verse, God denounces against the vineyard of his church the most awful deserved judgments, which the consciences of those to whom he appealed must have acknowledged just and equitable.—We have before us the divine purpose and determination respecting the Israelitish church, which the Lord was graciously pleased to make known, by our prophet, for their and our instruction. ‘ Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets †.’ He acquainted Noah of the flood he was about to bring upon the world of the ungodly: he informed Abraham of the destruction of Sodom: he revealed to Joseph the seven years famine with which the land of Egypt was visited: to our prophet, Jeremiah, and others, he communicated the knowledge of the captivity at Babylon. The future fortunes of Israel and Judah were foretold long before they happened, not only as instructive warnings of approaching judgments, but likewise for the same reason that our blessed Saviour told his disciples before-hand of the treachery of Ju-

* 2 Peter i. 5.—8.

† Amos. iii. 7.

das, 'That ye may believe, said he, that I am *.' The Almighty indeed sometimes executes upon transgressors those judgments which were never heard of until they are felt. Commonly, however, he lets men hear of them before they are inflicted: he sounds the trumpet before he goeth forth to battle: he intimates his designs to his servants, that they may call upon men to prepare to meet the Lord; to repent, and return to the Most High, that they perish not. Being thus warned, they are deprived of every excuse with which ignorance might have furnished them.

I will take away the hedge thereof; and to the same purpose, in the following clause, *and break down the wall thereof.* The first judgment here threatened, is, the removal of the benefit first mentioned in the second verse, which God had conferred upon his people. This circumstance, worthy of our attention, conveys this useful instruction, That the supreme Disposer of all events often begins to execute his judgments where he began to confer his favours, and removes them in the same order he bestowed them. The word translated *hedge*, signifies a fence made of thorns, intended to protect the vineyard, or garden, from the injuries it might receive from the beasts of the field. That which is rendered *wall*, means a strong fence built with stones, designed to protect it from the hand of fraud or violence. The hedge threatened to be taken away, we suppose, was the defence which God set around the Israelitish church, by means of laws, judges, princes, and rulers, whereby he guarded them from innumerable dangers. The wall threatened to be broken down, may signify the protection of divine providence, which encompassed them like a wall, and proved a sure defence against the hostile attacks of their enemies. These being removed, they were consequently to be exposed to imminent dangers, and violent incursions, upon all quarters. This great ca-

* John xiii. 19.

lamity Moses, the servant of the Lord, anciently foretold should certainly be inflicted upon them, did they forsake God, and break his covenant: ‘Then (said God) my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them*.’ Asaph, contemplating the forlorn state of this vineyard, when this threatening received a partial accomplishment, thus complains: ‘Why hast thou broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her. The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it†.’

It shall be eaten up—and it shall be trodden down. These expressions plainly foretold in what manner the Jewish nation were to be treated by their enemies; some of whom were to be greedily devoured, whilst others should be trampled upon with indignation, and trodden down in triumph, as a proof of their subjection to foreign power. And thus it actually came to pass, when, on account of their multiplied transgressions, God deprived that people of their defence, and exposed them to the hostile attacks of their powerful enemies. The Assyrians fell upon Ephraim; the Babylonians attacked Judah: they laid waste their land, they demolished their fortresses, they burnt their temple, and led them away captive into strange countries, until they found, in woful experience, what an evil and bitter thing it was, that they had forsaken the Lord their God. And afterward these predictions were more fully verified, when the Romans carried devastation through the whole land, and both consumed and trod them down, until destruction came upon them to the uttermost.—These righteous judgments, executed upon Israel and Judah for their sins, are recorded for our admonition; and instruct

* Deut. xxxi. 17.

† Psal. lxxx. 12, 13.

us to beware of abusing the many inestimable privileges we enjoy, lest God be thereby provoked to take away from us the hedge of his protection. Attend to the direction given for this purpose, by the prophet Jeremiah; ‘Go ye now unto my place, which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did unto it, for the wickedness of my people Israel*.’

6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

Other evils are here threatened to be executed upon the unfruitful house of Israel, as consequences of the prediction contained in the preceding verse.—The vineyard which God had planted in Canaan, was to be so desolated as to become like a desert or wilderness. With this prophecy the declaration published by Jeremiah exactly agrees: ‘For thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end †.’ Though the nation was to be desolated, and the foretold devastation was to be general, the whole church of God was not to be destroyed; a remnant of the true worshippers of God was still to be preserved. Hence, in the book of Lamentations, that remnant is introduced, bewailing their deplorable condition, in these affecting words; ‘He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate ‡.’ This threatening was renewed by Jesus Christ, toward the conclusion of his public ministry: ‘Behold, your house is left unto you desolate ||.’ And after his ascension, it was accomplished in a still greater degree than in former times. It is unnecessary, under this article, to

* Jer. vii. 12.

† Jer. iv. 27.

‡ Lam. iii. 11.

|| Matth. xxiii. 38.

shew in what manner the Jewish church was brought into a ruinous condition, as this subject is described in the following part of this verse.—From what hath now been said, we learn, that however highly distinguished by privileges and purity any church of God may be, it may so lamentably degenerate as to be laid waste by divine judgments. The church of Israel, the churches in Judea, the churches of Asia, are affecting proofs of this interesting truth. Whence originated the great change which passed upon these churches? God, who conferred upon them most important advantages, justly expected that they would have repented of their evil ways; that they would have worshipped him in the manner he required; that they would have executed justice, shewn mercy to the afflicted, and walked in his commandments: whereas they became unthankful, and unfruitful; in consequence whereof, he withdrew from them his protection, and then they were laid waste. ‘Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem (saith God), lest my soul depart from thee: lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited*.’

It shall not be pruned. By pruning trees, or vines, the superfluous, useless wood, that might hinder their fruitfulness, is lopt off with a proper instrument. The expression, applied to the church of God, may denote the exercise of necessary discipline, by which vice receives a severe check, and evil men, who are unfruitful to God, and injurious to others, are cut off, like hurtful branches. This useful work is performed, by the servants of God, according to the directions given in his word; who, by their decisions and censures, prove to the church what a pruning-hook is to the vine. These decisions, like the axe of which John the Baptist speaks, they are sometimes obliged to lay to the root of the tree. Now, when God here saith concerning his vineyard, it shall not be pruned, he

* Jer. vi. 8.

acquainted his ancient church, that, at the period to which he refers, he would not, for their benefit, correct them any longer, nor employ his servants to repress their abounding iniquities, or to cut off from among them the wicked and profane. Thus were they to be deprived of a substantial proof of God's kindness and care toward his vineyard: 'Every branch in which
' that beareth not fruit, he taketh away: and every
' branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may
' bring forth more fruit*.'——Considering this prophecy as looking forward to the captivity at Babylon, the words must be understood in a limited sense; for about that period, the prophet Ezekiel, and others, were employed in using their best offices to cultivate this vineyard, which after that time assumed a much better appearance. Viewing it as referring to the desolation brought upon the Jewish church by the Romans, we may give the prediction its full force; for after the days of our Saviour, and his apostles, that once highly favoured people did no more enjoy this peculiar privilege, of which, as here foretold, they were bereaved.

Nor digged. In cultivating a garden or vineyard, the trees or vines must be properly digged about, in order to loose the earth, to expose it to the sun and the rain, to clean away whatever is hurtful to the roots, and to give them room to grow and spread. In reference to this well-known practice, the figurative expression here used, may denote, that the faithful servants of God were no longer to be employed, in laying open the foundations upon which the faith and hope of the church were established, in exterminating false opinions, in pulling up by the roots the errors that had crept in among them, and in detaching the minds of men from earthly objects; all which are necessary to their growth and fruitfulness. To this important work God hath been pleased to send

* Joha xv. 2.

forth his servants in every age; and, when properly executed, it hath never failed, through the divine blessing, to produce the most happy effects. The neglect of it hath ever been attended with the worst consequences, and therefore ought to be considered as a heavy judgment.—Of the truth of this threatening the Jewish church had experience, in some measure, about the time of the Babylonish captivity; and when desolated by the Romans, so far from enjoying the privilege of being digged, in the sense now given, that, in this respect, it was totally neglected.

But there shall come up briars and thorns. These were threatened by the Almighty to be the production of the earth, when it was laid under the curse, after man had transgressed against his Maker*. The consequences of this awful curse you have every day before your eyes, in the barrenness of the earth, which, if left uncultivated, would produce little or nothing but these noxious plants, with which it would soon be over-run. Briars and thorns, you well know, are hurtful things, dangerous to handle, and good for nothing almost but to be dug up, and burnt in the fire. They afford, however, an instructive representation of wicked men, who are often spoken of in scripture under this similitude. Of this you may see a remarkable instance, Micah vii. 4. where the church, complaining of the small number, and deplorable corruption of those of whom it was composed, thus speaks: ‘The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge.’ In this figurative sense the expression before us must be understood. The briars and thorns here intended, are wicked, ungodly people, whose minds are occupied with sinful imaginations, whose lives are filled up with wicked actions, who are unprofitable to themselves, and hurtful to others. They produce nothing but unbelief, impenitence, and immorality, the unfruitful

* Gen. iii. 18.

works of darknefs, which never yield any real advantage to themfelves, or to the world: on the contrary, to them is to be attributed all the confufion and devaftation that hath overfpread the earth.—Such were the briers and thorns which were to fpring up in the Jewish church, at the period to which this prediction refers; namely, at the time of the captivity at Babylon, and efppecially at the defolation made by the Romans. Notwithftanding all the advantages they had long enjoyed, many among them refufed to believe the truths of God; or, if they profefled to receive them, they would not amend their lives; or, if they pretended to fome reformation, they did not perfevere in their profefion. Their hearts were impregnated with the feeds of corruption, which grew up in great abundance, and brought forth all manner of fin and wickednefs, not only without means, but in oppofition to excellent means of improvement.

I will alfo command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. This is the fixth, and laft awful judgment, which God here threatens to inflict upon the unfruitful vineyard of the Jewish church. Rain, you know, is the fmall drops of water which fall from the heavens upon the earth, communicating to it that moiſture of which it muſt be poſſeſſed, in order to its conveying nourifhment to the feeds which are fown into it, that they may become fruitful. It is frequently fpoken of in a metaphorical ſenſe in ſcripture; and then it denotes the word of God, to which it is compared, Chap. lv. 10, 11. of this prophecy. The reſemblance merits attention. The rain ſent from heaven to water the earth, is the effect of the ſovereign good pleaſure of the Almighty, who claims the gift of this ineſtimable bleſſing as his peculiar prerogative*. In like manner, the word of God is diſpenſed as ſeemeth good in his ſight: he ſendeth it to one people, and not to another; to one city, and not to another;

* Jer. xiv. 22.

at one season, and not at another. The word of God, like showers of rain, is sometimes given more gently and sparingly, and at other times more copiously and plentifully. Like the literal rain, which fructifies the earth, it renders the people of God fruitful in every good work.—The prophets and teachers of the Jewish nation, may be intended by the clouds here mentioned. Their employment was, to collect the word of God, that, being filled with the knowledge of his will, they might distribute this precious treasure among the church; which, when accompanied with the divine blessing, rendereth them fruitful in knowledge, faith, and righteousness. Here God threatens, that he will command these clouds that they rain no rain of the word of God upon his vineyard, at the time to which this prediction refers. How awful the judgment! The rain is not more necessary to the earth, than the word of the Lord to the souls of men. The great end of divine dispensations, the future manifestation of divine glory, the tender care of the Saviour of the church, the weakness of our natural faculties for receiving spiritual things, the feebleness of our graces which require continual supplies, the variety of temptations which must be resisted, all unite in demonstrating the absolute necessity of the rain here spoken of. Truly deplorable then must be the condition of those who seek the word of God, and do not find it; or, having obtained it, read, and do not understand it, nor receive the instructions and consolations it is intended to convey.—This, with the former articles in the prediction, were remarkably fulfilled, in different degrees, at the two memorable periods I have marked for the time of their accomplishment. In the manner now described, a righteous God commonly proceeds against unfruitful professors in his church: in perfect righteousness, he withdraws from them the inestimable privileges they had ungratefully abused. This procedure ought to excite us to improve, with the greatest diligence, the

important

important advantages we enjoy, lest, by our neglect, we expose ourselves to similar divine judgments with those inflicted upon the Jewish church.

7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

This verse contains a short explanation of the chief subjects mentioned in the foregoing song, or parable.—By the house of Israel, is meant all the posterity of the patriarch Jacob, formed into one great family or society. The descendants of that great man derived this name from a very memorable circumstance, recorded in the history of his life. There once wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day, whom Jacob refused to let go, except he blessed him. After asking Jacob's name, he said, 'Thy name shall be no more called Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed*.' This new and honourable name, which he received after this extraordinary transaction, hath been bestowed on his posterity in all ages. The house of Israel composed the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, on whom he conferred the peculiar prerogatives mentioned in the first and second verses of this chapter, in consequence of which he expected from them abundance of good fruit.—You that are attentive cannot fail to remark, that the same person whom our prophet, in the fifth verse, called his well-beloved, is the Lord of hosts, of whom he here speaks. This mighty Lord, who does in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of this earth, whatever pleaseth him, was the object of our prophet's supreme affection, and the person to whom this song was sung.—

* Gen. xxxii. 24. *et seq.*

And the men of Judah his pleasant plant. It is evident, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews remarks, that our Lord sprang out of Judah, the tribe which contained within its boundaries the city Jerusalem, in which resided the kings of Israel, and wherein was built the temple of the Lord. After the other tribes had apostatized from the worship of the true God, and ‘compassed him about with lies, Judah ruled ‘with God, and was faithful with the Most Holy*.’ Among the men of Judah, the duties of divine worship, and the fruits of righteousness, were found in greater perfection and abundance than among the people of Ephraim. On this account they might have given them the description of God’s pleasant plants, in whom he much delighted.—It is a certain, and, my brethren, it is a comfortable truth, that the Lord loveth them that follow after righteousness; he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and that hope in his mercy. Let it be your chief ambition to be of the planting of the Lord, in whom he is glorified; and beloved of him, whose affection is infinitely to be preferred to that of all the creatures.

And he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. By judgment, may be here meant the knowledge of good and evil, the discernment of right and wrong, united with the practice of justice and equity. In this sense it frequently occurs in scripture; as in the following passage: ‘Blessed ‘are they that keep judgment, and he that doth ‘righteousness at all times †.’ The word may not only denote *equitable*, but also *mild conduct*, mixed with mercy and moderation, in exacting what is due to us by others, in opposition to rigour, and extreme severity. Thus it must be understood, where the prophet entreats, ‘Correct me, but with judgment; not in ‘thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing ‡. In this last sense, it stands in direct opposition to the op-

* Heb. vi. 12.

† Psal. cvi. 3.

‡ Jer. x. 24.

pression which was substituted in its place.—By righteousness, may be intended that upright and just conduct which God requires us invariably to observe in all our transactions with one another, summed up in the perfect rule of equity given by our Saviour: ‘Therefore all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets*.’ Such righteousness forms a striking contrast to the fraud and injustice which gave occasion to the cry of which the prophet speaks. He that worketh this righteousness shall never be moved. Both expressions seem to be of the same import: or the former may relate to just sentiments respecting good and evil; and the latter, to the corresponding practice of those things that are just and equal. After the many important advantages wherewith God had distinguished the people of Israel, he looked that they would have received, and understood the instructions of judgment; he expected from them the exercises of righteousness, which exalteth a nation, and redoundeth to the praise and glory of God. To these things they were encouraged by many promises of most desirable blessings; of which take the following as a specimen: ‘That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee †.’ Indeed never did they flourish and prosper as when they performed judgment and righteousness: then they experienced the truth of their wise sovereign’s excellent observations; ‘He that followeth after righteousness and mercy, findeth life, righteousness, and honour ‡. In the way of righteousness is life, and in the path-way thereof there is no death §.’

But behold oppression. The Hebrew word rendered *oppression*, signifies a *scab*, a *wound*, or *leprosy*. As these things spoil the beauty and soundness of the hu-

* Matth. vii. 12.

† Deut. xvi. 20.

‡ Prov. xxi. 21.

§ Prov. xii. 28.

man body, and make it diseased and loathsome, so oppression renders the body politic, or ecclesiastical, deformed and odious, reduces it to a dangerous condition, and excludes it from agreeable intercourse with God. It is a very great evil, a very heinous sin. Oppression consists in the abuse of power; and, therefore, most commonly proceeds from those who are exalted above others in opulence and influence: for what Solomon remarked of old is always true, ‘That on the side of oppression is power.’ It always discovers a haughty and cruel disposition, with a contempt of justice and clemency. The poor and needy, the fatherless and the widow, the orphan and the stranger, are ordinarily the objects who are hurt by this crime; and, therefore, God cautioned his people to beware of injuring these helpless classes of mankind*. Taking advantage from the necessities and circumstances, of the unhappy persons who are the objects of it, to over-reach them, or prejudice their interests, it greedily seizes their possessions, deprives them of their liberty, injures their reputation and credit, and employs every effort to make them appear weak or wicked, foolish or factious. Oppression then is a very enormous crime, exceedingly offensive to God, and highly injurious to the sacred rights of mankind; being a wicked perversion of the benevolent designs of divine providence, in exalting some persons above others, that they may be a protection and support to the weak and indigent, that they may give counsel and comfort to them that need them.

But behold a cry. It is not here said who cried, or to whom the cry was directed; and so the expression admits of a double interpretation, either as it describes the mournful complaints of the oppressed, or the rigorous demands of the oppressors. Oppression is a crying sin, which, though the oppressed should keep silence, calleth aloud for vengeance. Such, how-

* See Exod. xxii 21.

ever, is commonly the misery of their condition, that they are obliged to unite their cry with that of their oppressors, who loudly exacted their cruel demands. Hundreds, thousands loudly exclaimed, because their vineyards were taken from them, their houses were devoured, their fields were pillaged, the wages they had earned were detained, the faces of the poor were grinded, their cause was not heard, nor their grievances redressed. Those who assumed the character of priests and prophets, polluted the sanctuary, and the ordinances of the Most High: the princes, and the rulers, injured the rights and properties of the people. In few words, superstition abounded in the church, injustice and oppression in the state: and to such a pitch did these crying iniquities arrive, that the city Jerusalem is thus spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah; 'She is wholly oppression in the midst of her *.' What a contrast between righteousness, the effect of which is quietness and assurance for ever, and oppression, attended with a cry that reacheth the throne of the almighty Avenger!—Such was the corrupt state of the Jewish church prior to the Babylonish captivity, as is abundantly evident from the writings of the prophets. This corruption and depravity arrived at a still greater height, and became more conspicuous, about the time our blessed Saviour came seeking fruit from the vineyard; as we learn from the parable, recorded Matth. xxi. 33. and following verses, and many other passages inserted in the gospels.—Let us then diligently beware of the aggravated crimes of injustice and oppression, with the other sins which exposed the posterity of Israel to the most terrible calamities, lest, partaking in their sins, we share in their punishments. Contemplating their captivity, and afterward their destruction, as awful warnings of the danger of unfruitfulness in those whom God hath distinguished by his favour, let us

* Jer. li. 3.

bring forth fruit with patience, that, having our fruit unto holiness now, in the end, we may obtain everlasting life.

8 ¶ Wo unto them that join house to house, *that* lay field to field, till *there be* no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.

The first of the six woes denounced in this chapter, is against the covetous and avaricious, whose minds are inflamed with insatiable rapacity, and boundless ambition.—The persons here described, already possessed a house and a field; but dissatisfied with what they enjoyed, they were eagerly intent upon acquiring more; and were as anxious to enlarge their estates, as if their life and happiness consisted in the abundance of earthly things. In opposition to the divine command, which required that they should not seek great things for themselves, they were bent upon increasing their riches, and enlarging their territories; so that, like the grave, they could never say it is enough. Measuring their estates by their desires, they were greedy to acquire more houses, and more lands: endeavouring, by every mean, both fair and fraudulent, to amass wealth, and increase gain, they exerted their utmost abilities in forming and executing schemes, whereby they might add to their treasures. Afraid of losing what they had acquired, they eat the bread of carefulness: penurious in using the riches they possessed, and solicitous to aggrandize their fortunes, they deprived themselves of the comfort they might have enjoyed; they coveted the property of their neighbours, and defrauded the great Lord of all of the tribute he justly demands, as an acknowledgment that all things come of him. By successful industry, and the blessing of God attending their diligent application to business, they might have lawfully added a house and a field to their former inheritances;

and on this account, we suppose, they would not have been censured. What was culpable in the persons threatened, and what is condemned here, was the insatiable desires, and incessant endeavours, of covetous men after earthly things. The expression used in this verse, like that of joining hand in hand, intimates, that they were keenly set on uniting together houses and fields without end, that their name might continue for ever. This odious character was remarkably exemplified in the conduct of covetous king Ahab, who, dissatisfied with a kingdom, could not enjoy his royal domains, whilst Naboth had a vineyard in the vicinity of his palace.

Till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth. The persons spoken of, made their little selves the centre of their activity, in which all the lines of their exertion terminated. Man being a social creature, designed to advance the interests of society, he must have counteracted the first principles in his nature, by his covetous, ambitious endeavours, that he might be placed alone in the midst of the earth. The expression must not be understood in its strictest sense, as if the people, whose practice is here condemned, wished to live entirely alone, and to have no person near them. Men of the description before us, are averse to solitude, and often terrified to be alone. It imports, that they were anxious no room might be left to rival them in power, influence, or property; that they were solicitous all around them might be their inferiors, obliged to give them place, to do them homage as their vassals and tenants, to administer felicitations to their pride and ambition, and, in some respect or other, to acknowledge them their superiors. Such odious characters were frequent in the days of our prophet, and his cotemporary Micah, whose words exactly correspond to these we are considering: ‘Wo to them that
 ‘ devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds: when
 ‘ the morning is light they practise it, because it is in
 ‘ the

‘ the power of their hand. And they covet fields,
 ‘ and take them by violence; and houses, and take
 ‘ them away; so they oppress a man, and his house,
 ‘ even a man and his heritage. Therefore thus saith
 ‘ the Lord, Behold, against this family do I devise an
 ‘ evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks,
 ‘ neither shall ye go haughtily: for this time is evil*.’

It is probable that persons of this sort greatly multiplied, during the period which elapsed from the delivery of this prophecy until the captivity at Babylon. Toward the conclusion of the Jewish dispensation, men of the above description mightily increased among that people. Avarice, rapacity, injustice, and oppression, were the sins for which they were remarkably conspicuous, and frequently threatened.

Against such persons God denounces, by his servant Isaiah, misery and wo; comprehending all manner of evils, which should befall them, both in this and the future world; and which, even in this life, would afflict them in their consciences, reputation, and property. The most terrible calamities are expressed in scripture by this short word, of which many instances occur both in the Old and New Testament. The practice here condemned, proceeding from that covetousness which is idolatry, justly merited misery and wo. It affords strong proof that men are destitute of the love of God; that they distrust the care of his kind providence; that they contemn the authority of his word; that their hearts are set upon this world; that they are cruel and oppressive toward their brethren, to whose welfare they are indifferent. Justly, therefore, are they exposed to the displeasure of almighty God, whose curse is in the habitation of the wicked. Sometimes the curse enters into their hearts, and prevents them from enjoying comfort in their estates, and perplexes them with fears and cares about their possessions: at

* Micah ii. 1, 2, 3.

other times it wastes and consumes them like a moth, or suddenly devours them by fire and sword; and, in some instances, they are plundered by enemies of all their effects, or snatched away from their enjoyments by captivity and death.—What an instructive warning does this administer to us, my friends, to take heed and beware of covetousness, which debases the mind, excites insatiable desires of more than we can expect to acquire, and reduces those who live under its influence into a much worse condition than if they had little or nothing with contentment! Even whilst the covetous and ambitious man is adding field to field, and house to house, and hath much goods laid up for many years, he is miserable. ‘Let your conversation then be without covetousness; be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*.’

9 In mine ears, *said* the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, *even* great and fair without inhabitant.

In this, and the following verse, the punishment of the crime mentioned in the foregoing one is described.—The prophet introduces the subject, by acquainting us in what manner this information was conveyed to him. It was gently whispered in his ear by a voice from God, to excite him to receive this instruction with the greatest attention and care; to intimate, that the subject made known to him remained a profound secret, of which others were ignorant; and that it might leave such impression on his heart as might never be effaced. In this manner God was pleased, from time to time, to reveal his mind to his servants of old, as Elihu remarks, Job. xxxiii. 14, 15, 16. Thus the Lord of hosts, wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working, graciously condescended to communicate to Isaiah the knowledge of those awful judg-

* Heb. xiii. 5.

ments which he was about to inflict on his people, on account of their avarice and ambition.—To give the utmost certainty to this prediction, it is delivered in the form of an oath. The sentence in the Hebrew text seems to be incomplete; and is differently rendered in our version, and in the margin of some of your Bibles. The Lord of hosts is frequently introduced in scripture giving the most solemn assurances to his people of the truth of what he declares, many instances of which might easily be produced. I only refer you to one, which you will find in Psal. xcvi. 10, 11.: ‘Unto a people that do err in heart, and have not known my ways, I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.’ And in the words before us, he affirms, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, &c. Great numbers of elegant houses, and sumptuous edifices, had been built in the land of Israel, at a vast expence, and beautifully adorned by the best of tradesmen; but being built out of the spoils of the poor, and the gains of oppression, these large convenient structures were to become desolate and ruinous, without inhabitant.—The possessions of wicked men, however excellent, shall certainly be desolated: their prosperity, not like the permanent light of the sun, but like that of a taper, which consumes itself, shall soon be extinguished. This is a circumstance truly worthy of our serious attention, and practical regard.

10 Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah.

In the former verse, desolation was threatened to those superb buildings, which the covetous, among the posterity of Israel, had erected, to gratify their pride and ambition. In this verse, the rich fields they possessed are threatened to be converted into a barren and desolate country.—They expected great increase
from

from the vineyards and fields of which they had possession, or hoped to acquire; whereas God here declares, that he would blast the fruits of both, and disappoint their expectations. An acre of land contains forty poles or perches in length, and four in breadth; or two hundred and twenty yards multiplied by twenty-two, being four thousand eight hundred and forty yards. A large vineyard, including ten of these acres, was to produce only one bath. The bath and the ephah were measures of the same size. The bath, which contained about eight or nine gallons English, was used for measuring liquids. The ephah, which was equal to half a bushel and a pottle English, was employed in measuring corns and dry goods. Each of them held the tenth part of an homer, which was equal to fourteen bushels and one pottle. So very great was the change to be made upon the vineyards and fields in the land of Canaan, which yielded the most luxuriant crops, and abundance of the richest wines, that, at the period to which this prediction referred, ten acres of vineyard were to yield only the scanty produce of nine gallons of wine, and fourteen bushels of seed-corn was to bring no more than about the tenth part of the seed sown.—The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth. The judgments of God are always inflicted in perfect righteousness, and the punishment often corresponds to the sin committed. This truth Adoni-bezek was obliged to acknowledge, after his thumbs and great toes were cut off: ‘Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath required me*.’ In every age this remark hath been verified. ‘Whoso,’ saith Solomon, ‘stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.’ Israel were informed by the prophet Jeremiah, whom God instructed to say, ‘Like as ye have forsaken me,

* Judges i. 7.

‘ and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye
 ‘ serve strangers in a land which is not yours *.’ The
 persons to whom this prophecy was directed, had
 endeavoured, through avarice, to deprive their bre-
 thren of their possessions; and therefore God threat-
 ens to take away the fruitfulness of their fields, and to
 send them scarcity of corn and wine, on the increase
 of which their hearts were keenly set.—This predic-
 tion was remarkably fulfilled about the time of the
 Babylonish captivity, and afterward more especially at
 the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

II ¶ Wo unto them that rise up early in the
 morning, *that* they may follow strong drink,
 that continue until night, *till* wine inflame them.

Complicated wo and misery are next denounced
 against those who are addicted to intemperance and
 luxury, and indulge in thoughtlessness and inconfidera-
 tion.—The prophet strongly condemns intempe-
 rance, and excess in sensual pleasures, particularly in
 drinking. Early rising in the morning conduces much
 to give health and vigour to the constitution. Lying
 long in bed is an intemperance of the worst kind: it ge-
 nerates diseases in the body; it enervates the mind, and
 is attended with many bad consequences. Rising early
 is necessary to the dispatch of business, the morning
 being the best season for arranging our affairs, for per-
 forming most kinds of work, and making such progress
 as accidents and avocations may not disturb, nor on the
 whole greatly retard, in the execution of our well-laid
 schemes. It is of considerable importance to the in-
 terests of devotion. In the morning the animal spi-
 rits are recruited, our bodies are refreshed, we are
 furnished with new grounds of gratitude and praise;
 and being then most lively and vigorous, it becomes
 the most proper season for prayer, and other devo-

* Jer. v. 19

tional exercifes. The moft eminent faints, therefore, of whom we read in fcripture, fuch as Abraham, Mofes, David, and others, are faid to have rifen early, to feek God, whofe going forth is prepared as the morning; and to direct their prayers to him, in expectation of gracious answers.—Thofe who are given to intemperance, rife early for other purpofes than thefe; namely,

* *That they may follow ftrong drink, &c.* They are as keenly employed in gratifying their finful, infatiable appetite, as the induftrious mechanic, or laborious husbandman, in following the bufineffes of their profeflion. Among the intemperate, there are fome who ftill retain a fenfe of decency, and confider drunkennefs as a work of darknefs: when, therefore, they get drunk, as the apoftle Paul fays, ‘ They are ‘ drunken in the night.’ There are others who come under the defcription before us, and take pleafure to riot in the day, when they ought to be employed in following their lawful bufineffes. Fond of intoxicating liquors, they rife early in the morning to engage in the pernicious practice of drinking, and are affiduous in their application to this difgraceful employment from morning to night. By this criminal indulgence, they confume much of their precious time, they abufe the good creatures of God, they enfeeble their minds, they hurt their conftitution, they injure their temporal as well as fpiritual interefts, and expofe themfelves to the righteous judgments of Heaven. If you inquire with Solomon, ‘ Who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? ‘ who hath wounds without caufe? who hath rednefs ‘ of eyes?’ I return you his answer: ‘ They that ‘ tarry long at the wine, they that go to feek mixt ‘ wine *.’—Take heed then to yourfelves, brethren, left at any time your hearts be over-charged with furfeiting and drunkennefs. Such is the divine

* Prov. xxiii. 29, 30.

bounty, that it gives us all things richly to enjoy: it furnishes us not only with the necessaries, but also with the conveniencies and comforts of life. Abuse them not by intemperance, but use them as those who know the fashion of this world passeth away. Be sober and moderate in the use of all the comforts you enjoy, and the refreshments which you take, and guard with caution against all temptations to excess.

12 And the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands.

The conduct which is here censured, consisted in an intemperate and unreasonable indulgence in the luxuries of instrumental music, and elegant entertainments. Music and feasting are things in themselves lawful, and on proper occasions expedient. The king of Israel, who had this honourable testimony, that he was a man according to God's own heart, invented instruments of music, which were employed in praising the Lord. The feasts among the Jews seem to have been commonly attended with instrumental music, which to some of the guests would be the most delicious part of the entertainment, whilst it would produce agreeable effects upon all who were present. Hence, in the book of Lamentations, the young men ceasing from music, is mentioned as a mournful consequence of the desolations there bewailed *.' And our Lord, in the parable of the prodigal son, introduces music and dancing upon the joyful occasion, which he there describes with inimitable beauty. Festivity, which was not unfrequent among the posterity of Israel, might be derived from their fathers, whose memory they professed highly to venerate. Abraham made a feast at the weaning of his son;

* Lam. v. 14.

Isaac made a feast for Abimelech, and Phichol the chief captain of his army; beside other instances which might be mentioned. Our blessed Saviour honoured with his presence a marriage-feast, in Cana of Galilee, where he changed water into wine, to supply the deficiency of the entertainment. Indeed we have not a doubt but that the good Lord who confers not only the necessaries, but the delicacies which cover the table of not a few, intends that they ought to be received with humility and thanksgiving on proper occasions.

Why then do you ask, Doth a righteous God denounce misery and wo against those who feasted, and in their feasts had music and wine? I suppose the sin which exposed them to the divine displeasure, consisted in their not attending to the seasons in which, with propriety, they might have made merry with their friends. To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: there is a time to mourn and to weep, and there is a time to laugh and to dance, as God hath taught us by the wisest of men *. Now if, after this instruction, people are so foolish and perverse as to employ the time in mirth and jollity, in which they are called to sorrow and lamentation, they thereby expose themselves to many terrible calamities. You may see a remarkable instance of the truth of this observation, recorded Chap. xxii. 12, 13, and 14. where you read, ‘ In
 ‘ that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weep-
 ‘ ing, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to
 ‘ girding with sackcloth: and behold, joy and glad-
 ‘ ness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh
 ‘ and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for to-
 ‘ morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine
 ‘ ears by the Lord of hosts, surely this iniquity shall
 ‘ not be purged from you, till ye die, saith the Lord
 ‘ God of hosts.’ The season there referred to, as we

* Eccles. iii. 1. *et seq.*

learn from the fifth verse of that chapter, ‘ was a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains.’ This was not a time for feasting and rejoicing: and by endeavouring to counteract the call of God, their sin became so aggravated, that he declares, it should not be purged. On the same account, complicated misery is here threatened against similar wicked conduct.—Diligently observe the dispensations of providence, carefully mark what seems to be their tendency and design, and faithfully improve the admonitions you thereby receive.

But they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Inconsideration, and neglect of the work of God, is the natural consequence of the practices above mentioned. The operation of God’s hand, may refer not to any particular dispensation, but to the whole work of divine providence toward mankind in general, and especially his peculiar people. The connection and design of the words seem to favour this interpretation. How wonderful, how diversified, and glorious, are the works of God, which are sought out of all them that have pleasure therein! How grand and magnificent are the operations of his hands, for the instruction and benefit of man; works in the heavens and upon the earth, works of judgment and mercy, works of vengeance and deliverance! They are accompanied with circumstances meriting the most serious consideration, and the highest admiration; for he hath put upon them such marks of his power as render them most worthy of regard. They are designed to accomplish the most valuable purposes, to display the glory of their divine Author, to lead up the thoughts of men to God himself, and to excite them to the exercises of gratitude, praise, and obedience. Many of them are placed fully in our view, that we may contemplate and admire them, though on this very account they

are often neglected and overlooked. The least of God's works, and the least of his mercies, ought not to be slightly passed by, much less his greatest works and deliverances in behalf of his church. To this subject we may apply the words of Jesus Christ, with respect to tithing mint, anise, and cummin, and doing the greater things of the law; 'These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.'

The people, against whom God, by the prophet, brought the charge before us, had their minds occupied with sensible objects, and deluded by sensual pleasures; therefore they avoided all serious consideration, and every spiritual exercise. They persisted in a criminal contempt of divine providence, which had wrought, on their account, the most stupendous wonders. These works of the Lord they ought to have attentively considered, and acknowledged them to be the Lord's doing, and marvellous in their eyes. Though they were witnesses of many great and surprising events, they did not view them as operations of the Almighty: they did not diligently apply their minds to the contemplation of the works of God, that they might perceive his power therein magnified, and discern his wisdom, goodness, and mercy therein manifested. Any impressions made upon their hearts, by the operations of the Most High, were of short duration, and easily effaced; as we learn from the seventy-eighth psalm, where it is recorded, to their everlasting reproach, 'That they soon forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them; that they remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.' To this important duty, therefore, in which they were culpably negligent, they were repeatedly invited by that great man, who once sat upon their throne, and whose devotional exercises they had among their hands: 'Come (said he), and behold the works of the Lord.' And because they regarded not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he foretold, that God

would destroy them, and not build them up*. This useful employment was greatly neglected by ‘the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name †;’ as is abundantly evident from many passages in the prophets and gospels, which I stay not to recite. This, among other sins, exposed them to misery and wo.—Whofo then is wise, let him observe divine dispensations, and he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, that is conspicuous in the manner and season in which he operates, the instruments he employs, the events which he accomplishes, the designs which he effectuates, and their correspondence to the revelation he hath given of his blessed will.

13 ¶ Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because *they have* no knowledge: and their honourable men *are* famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.

The punishment of the sins above mentioned, is described in this, and the following verses.—The judgment of captivity, which is here denounced, is spoken of, in the prophetic stile, as already executed; to intimate the absolute certainty, and near approach of the threatened calamity. The posterity of Israel were first led captive by Tiglath-pilezer king of Assyria, under the reign of Pekah king of Israel, and that of Jotham king of Judah, as we learn from 2 Kings xv. 27. and following verses. About the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, under the reign of Hothea over Israel, Shalmanezzer king of Assyria carried Israel again captive to Assyria, as we read 2 Kings xvii. 6. In the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against the fenced cities of Judah, and took them, and sent a great host against Jerusalem, as recorded 2 Kings xviii. 13. and follow-

* Psal. xxviii. 5.

† 1 Kings xviii. 31.

ing verses. Under the reign of Manasseh king of Judah, the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh and many of his people to Babylon, as it is written 2 Chron xxxiii. 11. After that Jehoahaz was elevated to the throne of Judah, Pharaoh-nechoh put him in bands at Riblah, and carried him away into Egypt, where he died, 2 Kings xxiii. 33, 34. In the days of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against Jerusalem, and besieged it, and carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes and mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen, as ye may see 2 Kings xxiv. 10. *et seq.* When Zedekiah was king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, with all his host, besieged Jerusalem, took the city, seized Zedekiah, bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon: and afterward Nebuzar-adan captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came unto Jerusalem, and burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire; and the remnant of the multitude he carried away: 2 Kings xxv. In after-times the Romans treated this people in the same manner with the Assyrians and Chaldees, and completed that captivity and destruction which was often foretold in prophecy. Thus went the house of Israel into captivity, according to this prediction, as a just punishment of their many aggravated transgressions.—Think upon the miseries that Israel must have sustained in these captivities, and from thence learn the evil and the danger of offending God.

Because they have no knowledge. Ignorance is the certain consequence of inconsideration: inconsideration is the natural effect of luxury and dissipation, which arise from gratified avarice and ambition. According to this process, Israel had become destitute of that excellent knowledge, more precious than gold, which consists in intimate acquaintance with the perfections,

fections, providence, and salvation of God, with the misery and danger of our condition, and the means whereby the eternal enjoyment of Jehovah may be attained. Such is the supreme excellence and inestimable value of this knowledge, that, in comparison of it, all other things ought to be esteemed only as dross or dung. It lies at the foundation of all true godliness, and is absolutely necessary to the love of God, and giving him that homage he justly requires. Who can love God that doth not know he is perfectly amiable? who will worship him that doth not know he is infinitely glorious? who will obey him that is not acquainted with his supreme authority? and who will praise him that doth not know his consummate goodness? The want of this knowledge was the reproach and ruin of the people of Israel, whose minds were blinded through the pernicious influence of carnal affections, and foolish prejudices, in so much that they neither observed the signs of the times, nor studied the word of God. On this account they are thus described by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘ My people are
‘ foolish, they have not known me, they are sottish
‘ children, and they have none understanding: they
‘ are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no
‘ knowledge *.’ And in after-times the apostle Paul charged them with the same criminal ignorance, for which they had been notorious in the days of the prophets, as ye may see Acts xiii. 27. where he affirms, That they that dwelt at Jerusalem, and their rulers, knew not the Son of God, nor yet the voices of the prophets which were read every Sabbath-day. They were willingly ignorant, because they found it more difficult to increase knowledge than to indulge in ignorance, more easy to sin in darkness than in the light of knowledge.—Admonished of the danger arising from the neglect of knowledge, permit me to address every one of you in the words of Solomon :

* Jer. iv. 22.

‘ My son, incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply
 ‘ thine heart to understanding : yea, if thou criest af-
 ‘ ter knowledge, and listest up thy voice for under-
 ‘ standing : if thou seekest her as silver, and search-
 ‘ est for her, as for hid treasures : then shalt thou un-
 ‘ derstand the fear of the Lord, and find the know-
 ‘ ledge of God *.’

And their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. These words seem intended to describe some of the direful calamities which the most respectable people, among the posterity of Israel, were to experience in the time of their captivity. Their honourable men, who were most esteemed on account of the dignity of their station, the greatness of their abilities, and the usefulness of their employments; their men of glory (as the Hebrew words signify), who were most eminent for pomp and splendour, were to be reduced to the greatest straits, and to become men of famine. Such persons were to experience the reverse of their former condition. They who frequently feasted at the most elegant entertainments, who fared sumptuously every day, and were much admired for their riches and affluence, were to feel the terrible effects of famine, and to be reduced to the utmost extremity, in want of the necessary supports of life.—*And their multitude dried up with thirst.* The common people, who were addicted to drink to excess, were to be parched with thirst, through the intense heat of the climate, the long journeys, and hard labour, to which they should be obliged to submit.—These predictions were remarkably verified about the time of the Babylonish captivity, as appears from the second chapter of the book of Lamentations; and were more fully accomplished, in the complicated miseries to which the Jews were exposed, and actually sustained from the Romans.—Hence let us be instructed to use with mo-

* Prov. ii. 2.—5.

deration the good things of this world, since God, in righteous judgment, often deprives those of the necessaries of life, who have abused the affluence they once enjoyed, for gratifying their corrupt appetites.

14 Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it.

This verse represents the certain consequences of the preceding judgments.—The word *hell*, in scripture, sometimes signifies the *grave*, or *state of the dead*: in this sense we understand the words of Moses, in which he affirms, respecting Korah and his companions, who were swallowed up in the earth, and buried alive, that they ‘descended quick into hell*.’ At other times, it denotes the state of destruction and misery with which death and the grave are followed to the wicked and ungodly; which is its obvious meaning in these awful words, ‘The wicked shall be turned into hell †.’ Death, the grave, and destruction, are frequently introduced, both in sacred and profane writings, in the form of a ravenous monster, opening wide his devouring jaws, that he may quickly swallow his prey. Of this you have an instance in the words which the wise man puts into the mouths of sinners, enticing others to join them in their wicked practices: ‘They say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole, as those that go down into the pit ‡. A proud ambitious man is said to enlarge his desires as hell; and is as death which cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people ||.’ The image is strong

* Numb. xvi. 30, 31. † Psal. ix. 17. ‡ Prov. i. 11, 12.
|| Hab. ii. 5.

and expressive in the highest degree. The people, to whom this prediction relates, indulged in feasting and drinking; and, therefore, were to perish with hunger and thirst: and their avaricious conquerors were to indulge their appetite as much as they had done, and devour them all. At the periods to which this prediction looked forward, the proud monarch of Babylon, and after him the mighty Roman emperor, enlarged themselves, they opened their mouths without measure, and greedily destroyed the Jewish people, which once were the flock of God's pasture, but having become ripe for destruction, fell a prey to their enemies.

And their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, &c. These expressions may denote the power and authority, the riches and affluence, the flocks and herds, the children and servants, by which they were enabled to make a conspicuous figure in the eyes of men, and rendered honourable and respectable in the view of the world. Their glory may comprehend whatsoever acquired for them reputation and renown, and conveyed to them a pre-eminence above others. In this sense, the infinite mercy of God is called his glory, and the passing over a transgression is said to be the glory of a man. The sons of Laban affixed this meaning to the glory of which they spake, in their invidious complaint against Jacob, when they affirmed, 'Of that which was our fathers hath he gotten all this glory *.'—With their glory and pomp, *their multitude* is joined; which consisted of the whole body of the Jewish nation, the great bulk of the people; so exceeding numerous, even at the time in which this prediction received its completion, that, according to Josephus, they amounted to two millions five hundred and fifty-six thousand persons.—*And he that rejoiceth shall descend into it*: he that rejoiceth in his personal qualifications of strength and comeliness, in his external advantages of riches and honour, in

* Gen. xxxi. 1.

his mental endowments of wisdom and understanding, or in his church-privileges, whereby he enjoyed many advantages beyond others. Dignity of station, felicity of condition, and joy of heart, could not free them from the general calamity. Persons of every description among them, were to descend into the state of death and destruction, which were to open their mouths to receive them; or they were to be obliged to descend into Assyria, and afterward into the Roman empire, where they were to be detained in captivity. No character however eminent, no condition however affluent or joyous, was to be exempted from sharing in the terrible judgments which were to be inflicted upon that sinful people, who are set forth as an instructive example of divine vengeance.— This prophecy was verified in its full extent, in the destruction of the Jews by the Roman army, when, according to their own historian Josephus, eleven hundred thousand were killed, and ninety-seven thousand were taken prisoners. In its accomplishment, we behold an awful instance of the righteous judgments of God, and an affecting proof of the truth of the prophecies, many of which referred to this great event.

15 And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.

People of all ranks, high and low, were to be deeply depressed and humbled, by the execution of the above-mentioned calamities.— This prediction is of similar import with that recorded Chap. ii. 17. which I have already considered. I observe, however, from the words before us; that none are so mean in their condition but they may be elated with pride, none so low but God can bring them lower, and none so high but the judgments of the Almighty can lay them low. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be abased, is the unalterable constitution

stitution of Heaven, the irreverfible decree of the Moft High, which he hath clearly illuftrated in the difpenfations of his providence and grace, which are intended to humble both the mighty and the mean among mankind. At the time to which this prediction looked forward, the lofty looks of people of every condition were humbled, by the divine judgments which, in the courfe of providence, were executed upon the pofterity of Ifrael, on account of their aggravated tranfgreffions. It is natural here to turn our thoughts to a glory on the one hand, and degradation on the other, of a more diftinguifhed nature, which happened about that period, whereby the fame purpofe was effectuated. By the humiliation, fufferings, and death of Jefus Chrift, principalities and powers were fpoiled, the former difpenfation, with its external grandeur and glory, was abolifhed; and in its room an œconomy was eftablifhed, diftinguifhed for its plainnefs and fimplicity, and a way opened for the fpiritual worfhip of the humble and poor in fpirit. In the inftitution of the gofpel, and the erection of the kingdom of Jefus Chrift, who was meek and lowly in heart, the rich and the great, the wife, the mighty, and the noble, find no pre-eminence. God hath chofen the weak, the defpifed, and the foolifh of the world, to confound the mighty, and to bring to nought things that are, that no flefh fhould glory in his prefence*. Thus we fee the divine procedure, both in mercy and judgment, is uniformly intended to humble both the mighty and the mean.

As workers together with God, we befeech you, brethren, to be humble, that ye receive not the providences and the grace of God in vain. Shall creatures who are as a fhadow and a vapour, who are like grafs, and at their beft eftate as a flower in the field—fhall fhort-lived, finful_duft and afhes be elated with pride? Remember you muft give account to the great Judge

* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28, 29.

of all, how you have used and improved those things which you make fewel to your pride. Amidst your fulness, recollect your deficiencies in knowledge, in grace, and in duty; and if you are properly sensible of what you lack, you will not be proud of what you have attained. Above all, fix your attention upon the astonishing humiliation of Jesus Christ. Did our Lord and Master humble himself? and shall we, his professed disciples, elevate ourselves? Did he become obedient to the death of the cross? and shall we be disobedient, and glory in our shame? Did he inculcate upon us humility in the most forcible manner? and shall we walk in pride, until we are abased by awful judgments.—If I have injured you, or my subject, by this digression, forgive me this wrong.

16 But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God *that is* holy, shall be sanctified in righteousness.

Because Israel did not exalt and sanctify the Lord of hosts, by the practice of judgment and righteousness, God declares, that he would accomplish this end, by inflicting righteous judgments upon that perfidious and rebellious people.—The meaning of the first part of this verse depends upon the sense which we affix to the word *judgment*, which admits of different significations. Sometimes it denotes wisdom and prudence, the ability of discerning and determining justly with respect to every one's right. In this sense our prophet affirms, that the Lord is a God of judgment * : he is infinitely wise, and perfect in knowledge. According to this interpretation, God is exalted by the displays he affords of his consummate wisdom, in humbling the proud among men: he shews, that he hath the most intimate acquaintance with every character; that he perfectly knoweth what is proper to be

* Isaiah xxx. 18.

done, in what manner, at what time, and by what instruments it ought to be performed. At other times, judgment, when ascribed to God, signifies that moderation and clemency with which the distribution of justice is tempered, as in the following prayer of Jeremiah: ‘Correct me, O Lord, but with judgment*.’ In this view, the Lord of hosts is exalted, by moderating the punishments he inflicts, and preserving them within the bounds marked by wisdom and discretion. In some passages, the word denotes those calamities which God inflicts upon transgressors, for accomplishing most important purposes, as where we read ‘of executing upon the Heathen the judgment that is written †.’ In this strange work, the Lord is exalted by punishing obstinate sinners (whatever may be their external circumstances), who have neglected him, who have been formal or hypocritical in his service, forgetful of his benefits, and disobedient to his laws. In other places, judgment signifies the exertion of influence and authority, for reforming things that have been wrong, for correcting abuses that have arisen, and for restoring to order things that have been in confusion, attended with the condemnation of those who excited these disturbances, and the absolution of those who were thereby injured. In this sense our blessed Saviour declared, ‘Now is the judgment of this world ‡.’ In this view also the Lord of hosts was to be exalted, in the judgment he was about to execute for the reformation of his church, the destruction of the ungodly, and the restoration of persons and things to their proper order. In these various ways God was to be exalted, at the time to which this prediction referred.

And God that is holy [or the holy God] shall be sanctified in righteousness. The holiness of God consists in his perfect freedom from all evil, and the consummate rectitude of his nature, according to which

* Jer. x. 24.

† Psal. cxlix. 9.

‡ John. xii. 31.

all his dispensations are regulated. This constitutes the excellency and majesty of his name, the beauty and glory of his divine essence; and communicates the most amiable lustre to all his other attributes, such as his wisdom, justice, and power. He is incomparably, unchangeably, and universally holy. In this glorious character, he appears lovely and venerable; and therefore, on this account, he is frequently celebrated in scripture.—This holy God shall be sanctified in righteousness. The holiness of Jehovah cannot admit of any increase, nor suffer any diminution; and therefore this expression cannot signify more than the manifestation and acknowledgment of this divine attribute. God sanctifies himself, by declaring his holiness in his dispensations toward men, by communicating the knowledge of this glory to the world, by rendering men holy like himself, by restoring the purity of his worship, and by taking vengeance upon the wicked. He is sanctified by others, when they reverence his great name, believe his testimony, acknowledge his mercies, obey his commands, and endeavour to attain a growing conformity to him in purity. In this manner God was to be sanctified, in the righteousness he was about to display, in punishing his perfidious people, according to the predictions of his servants, whereby they were timely advertised of their danger.—At the time of the Babylonish captivity, and afterward in the terrible destruction executed upon the Jews by the Romans, God demonstrated his infinite purity, and his just detestation of the many aggravated sins of his people, in so singular and remarkable a manner, as attracted the attention of the nations of the earth, who were thereby excited to reverence and honour the Lord of hosts.—Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, by humbly acknowledging the displays he gives you of his divine excellencies, and serving him with pure affections in all the duties of obedience.

17 Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

These words describe an agreeable event that should follow the accomplishment of the foregoing predictions.—They cannot be understood in their literal meaning, in which it is impossible to apply them to any event that was the subject of prophecy. Interpreters, therefore, agree to explain them in their mystical sense, which indeed is absolutely necessary to render them consistent with the connection in which they stand; and in this view we shall consider them. In the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the saints are frequently spoken of by the name of sheep*; little children, and weak Christians, the young and tender of the flock, are consequently called lambs†. There is a peculiar beauty and propriety in the figure, founded in the resemblance which the disciples of Jesus Christ bear to these creatures, in meekness and innocence, in simplicity and harmlessness, in feebleness and timidity, in liability to injuries and the attacks of enemies. The peculiar people of God then, and more especially the young and feeble among them, are the lambs; concerning whom it is foretold, they shall feed after their manner. The manner of feeding here intended, must be that for which persons of the above description are distinguished from all others. It is their special privilege, to feed, in a spiritual manner, upon the bread of life, that cometh down from heaven, upon that meat which endureth unto life everlasting. They live not by bread alone, but by every word of God, from which, through the divine blessing, they receive spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. This high prerogative they were to enjoy in peace and safety, at the time to which this prophecy refers.—Such is God's tender care of his

* Psa. c. 3. John x.

† Isaiah xl. 11. John xxi. 15.

people, that he never fails to provide for their defence and support amidst the greatest calamities.

And the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat. Fatness sometimes denotes, in scripture, abundance of temporal or spiritual good things; and fat ones is a description of such as enjoy the choicest external comforts, or spiritual advantages. The places which persons of this description once possessed, had been desolated, when the Almighty executed the threatening contained in the ninth verse of this chapter, and laid waste the habitations which were formerly occupied by the great and affluent. Having been deserted by their inhabitants, and fallen into decay, they were to be enjoyed by strangers; the dispersed Jews, who were carried away captive to Babylon, and afterward by those who were scattered by the Roman army, and thus rendered strangers in their own land. Upon their return from foreign countries, where they had been long detained, they were to possess the places which once belonged to the rich and honourable. Or by strangers, may be meant some of the Gentile nations, who, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, had this designation frequently given them by the Jews. These people were to possess the desolate places, which were formerly inhabited by the most considerable men among the posterity of Jacob. In either of these senses, the prediction was in some measure accomplished, about the time of the Babylonish captivity, and after the invasion of Judea by the Romans.—The fulfilment of this prophecy affords an agreeable proof of God's gracious regard for the young and feeble among his people, and the necessary provision which he makes for the destitute and the stranger; which ought to encourage us to hope in his mercy, and trust in his kind providence.

18 Wo unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-ropes.

The

The second wo is past, and behold, the third wo cometh quickly; which is denounced against those who, by false reasonings, and specious pretexts, persuade themselves to indulge in sinful practices, and to perpetrate the greatest acts of wickedness.—The character and conduct of the persons intended, is described in metaphorical language, which you who are acquainted with putting horses and oxen to the cart, and the plough, may easily understand. Iniquity or sin is the draught, which the persons spoken of drag along with them. This is indeed a heavy load, of an enormous weight, and always esteemed so by those who are sensible of the oppressive burden which is thereby imposed upon them. Cain felt this so much, that he exclaimed, ‘My sin is greater than I can bear *;’ and David experienced it to such a degree, that he complained, ‘Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me †.’ They press hard upon the consciences of transgressors, and expose them to an unsupportable weight of punishment. In reference to this instructive view of sin, one of the Hebrew words used to express the pardon of iniquity, signifies to take off a weight or burden; and one of the Greek words used for this purpose, denotes deliverance from bonds ‡. The persons here described, draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope. Cart-ropes, you know, are composed of several small cords firmly twisted together, which serve to connect the beasts of burden with the draught they pull after them. These represent a complication of means closely united, whereby the people here described continue to join themselves to the most wearisome of all burdens. They consist of false reasonings, foolish pretexts, and corrupt maxims, by which obstinate transgressors become firmly united to their sins, and persist in dragging after them their iniquities. Of this sort the fol-

* Gen. iv. 13.

† Psal. xxxviii. 4.

‡ Luke iv. 18.

lowing are a few specimens: God is merciful, and his goodness will not suffer any of his creatures to be completely and everlastingly miserable. Others, as well as they, are transgressors. Repentance will be time enough upon a death-bed, or in old age. The greatest of sinners often pass unpunished. A future state of retribution is uncertain. Unite these, and such-like cords, and, I suppose, you have the cartropes, whereby the persons mentioned draw after them much sin and iniquity.—All these pretexts, however, are light as vanity, like a vapour that riseth from the earth, a bubble that floats upon the water, or the breath that proceeds from our nostrils, as might easily be demonstrated, did time permit, and the subject require. Disappointment, misery, and wo, as here declared, shall be the certain portion of all those who, in this manner, are inseparably united to their sins.—Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity. If you are so unhappy as to have been deluded by your deceitful and desperately wicked hearts, through the allurements of this present evil world, the subtilty of the great deceiver, or the deceitfulness of sin, beware of continuing in the dangerous illusion, and of being any longer imposed upon by those things which either have no real existence, or are very different from their vain pretensions.

19 That say, Let him make speed, *and* hasten his work, that we may see *it*: and let the counsel of the holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know *it*.

The prophet continues the description, in this verse, of the persons whom he mentioned in the preceding one; and acquaints us with the language they deridingly used to the servants of God, who informed them of the awful judgments which were to be executed upon them on account of their wickedness.—The impudent replies which they made to the denunciations

ciations of righteous vengeance from God, were in words to the following purport: You have spoken much to us concerning the Holy One of Israel, the terrible judgments he will inflict upon us, and their sudden approach, we wish he would hasten the speedy accomplishment of these things, that we may see their performance. They scoffingly desired to behold the work of God, to be the spectators of his dispensations of mercy and judgment, and to become acquainted with his purposes, by observing their execution. This is the language of people quite at ease, in the most profound security, holding threatened calamities in sovereign contempt. Thus were their words stout against God, who granted them their request, as we learn from the 24th verse of this chapter; and ‘suddenly consumed them as the fire devoureth the stubble.’ In this manner the wicked and profane persons, against whom misery and wo are here denounced, spake contemptuously of the work and counsel of God; and, despising the riches of his forbearance, as if punishments advanced with too slow a pace, they wished for their speedy approach, to their own ruin. By a long progression in iniquity, they arrived at length to the highest degree of wickedness, bidding open defiance to God, and deriding his threatened judgments. Against such the prophet Amos proclaimed God’s righteous vengeance: ‘Wo unto you that desire the day of the Lord: to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it *?—’ This seems to have been a prevailing character among the Jews to whom Isaiah delivered this prophecy: it became still more frequent in the times preceding the

* Amos v. 18, 19, 20.

Babylonish captivity, and the overthrow of the Jewish state by the Romans, as is evident from the writings of the prophets, and the testimony of the apostles.— My brethren, the generation of scoffers is not yet extinct: for as the apostle Peter foretold, ‘ In the last days shall come scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*.’ Beware of joining yourselves to this ungodly crew. Harken to the salutary advice of the all-wise God, and compassionate Friend of men, recorded Chap. xxviii. 22. of this prophecy: ‘ Be ye not mockers, lest your hands be made strong.’ To disobey the authority of Jehovah is criminal and dangerous; to scoff at his word and threatenings is the height of presumption, and wickedness in the extreme. The danger of those who walk in the counsel of the ungodly is truly great; theirs is still greater who stand in the way of sinners; but their condition is beyond measure deplorable, and their case seems almost desperate, who sit in the seat of the scornful. ‘ Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away †.’

20 ¶ Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

The fourth wo is denounced against those who pervert the principles of truth, and the exercises of equity, which are inculcated in the law of God.—The sinfulness and odiousness of the character before us, consists in confounding things diametrically opposite in their nature and qualities, and giving the names which

* 2 Peter. iii. 3.

† Prov. iv. 14, 15.

properly belong to the one, to its contrary which is completely different. The practice here condemned, did not arise from ignorance or mistake, in which cases people are rather to be pitied than threatened; but proceeded from perverse obstinacy of temper, culpable in the highest degree. Instead of repenting of their sins, and condemning themselves on account of their wicked practices, they endeavoured to justify their conduct, by representing their evil actions, their works of darkness, which in the end would prove bitter as death, as good, desirable, and pleasant. Though, by the light of nature and revelation, they might easily have distinguished between good and evil, such was their wretched depravity, that they put the one for the other, changed their names, and misrepresented their natures. ‘ They blessed the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth: they called the proud happy: yea, they that work wickedness were set up; yea, even they that tempted God were delivered *. They said, Every one that doth evil, is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment †?’ Good and virtuous conduct, proceeding from right principles, and animated by proper motives, justly merits the name of good, of light, and of sweet, as it possesses all these qualities. In every sense it is good, being truly beautiful, pleasant, and profitable: like the light, it is desirable, cheering, and diffusive; and always accompanied with peculiar sweetness and satisfaction, for men of an excellent spirit delight greatly in the way wherein they walk. On the contrary, bad conduct, flowing from corrupt principles, and influenced by criminal intentions, no less justly deserves the name of evil, darkness, and bitterness, being strictly forbidden in the good word of God, and exposing men to the most dreadful evils: it proceeds from the darkness of ignorance, and leads down to the darkness of

* Mal. iii. 15.

† Mal. ii. 17.

death; and though for a little it may be like a sweet morsel under the tongue, it soon becomes as the gall and poison of asps. To confound these contraries, is to endeavour to overturn the great foundations of truth and equity; and to extinguish the candle of the Lord, that light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world, by the assistance of which men may discern good from evil, condemn the works of darkness, and approve of whatsoever things are just, honest, lovely, and virtuous. No wonder, therefore, that God, who is righteous, proclaims to persons of this description wo and misery.—This iniquitous practice unhappily prevailed among the posterity of Jacob in the latter period of the Jewish state, to which, we suppose, this prophecy had a special reference. The good word of God, wherein shone the light of life, and which marked out ways of pleasantness, was despised as if it had been evil; the curse was chosen rather than the blessing; death was preferred to life, and destruction to salvation. So perverse and corrupt did the children of Israel become, at the times to which this prediction refers.—Avoid, my friends, with solicitous care, every approach to this wicked and dangerous practice. Be not deluded by deceitful appearances: be not perverted by the bad example of those who are guilty of the flagrant transgression here threatened. O do not this abominable thing, saith God, which I hate! Attend to the everlasting distinctions which God hath established between good and evil, between light and darkness. You are professedly his servants, and therefore ought never to set up your will or judgment in opposition to the authority and determination of your Lord and Master. Take heed that you shoot not those arrows toward the heavens that may return upon your own heads. If the Almighty hath punished sins committed through infirmity, through sudden passion, and unexpected temptation, as he did Uzziah for touching the ark, Moses for speaking unadvisedly, and
Lot's

Lot's wife for looking behind her, certainly presumptuous sins shall be most severely punished, however much their perpetrators may be applauded by their flatterers.

21 Wo unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight.

The fifth wo is declared against those who are self-conceited, and puffed up with a vain opinion of their own good qualities.—Wisdom and prudence are intimately connected, and have a reciprocal influence upon each other. Wisdom consists in choosing the best ends, and pursuing them by the most proper means. Prudence is employed in applying to practice the rules dictated by wisdom, in order to attain valuable and important purposes. It is the office of wisdom to determine what actions are to be performed, whilst it belongs to prudence to attend to circumstances, that we may act with propriety and success. Persons are accounted wise and prudent, who keep in view the most excellent designs, who govern their passions with moderation, who conduct their affairs with discretion, and proportion their application to their several interests according to the dictates of well-informed minds, and the maxims of sound wisdom. They belong to this description who are possessed of a sound judgment, a quick penetration, and extensive knowledge, and improve these accomplishments for attaining the most valuable purposes. The wisdom and prudence of which such persons are possessed, cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. According to the apostle James's description, it is pure, free from the corruptions of sin and error; it is peaceable, disposing those who act under its influence to live in harmony and concord; it is gentle, bearing with meekness the infirmities and injuries of others; it is easy to be entreated, by the persuasion of sound reason,

son, and good counsel; it is full of mercy toward the offending, and the afflicted; it is without partiality in its operations, and without hypocrisy and dissimulation, being sincere in all its exertions. This wisdom, this prudence, is an invaluable gift, and forms a most desirable character.

Persons are said, in scripture, to have those qualifications in their own eyes or sight, which they vainly reckon they have acquired. A man is righteous in his own eyes, who entertains a high opinion of his own righteousness. A generation are pure in their own eyes, though not washed from their filthiness, who think highly of their own purity, though neither their hearts, nor their ways, are cleansed. In like manner, people are said to be wise and prudent in their own sight, who flatter themselves that these characters indeed belong to them, until the hatefulness of their iniquity is discovered. Though they know but little, they were never sensible of their ignorance; though, in the view of God, and men of understanding, they are foolish, they never were convinced of their folly. Elated with their supposed excellence on every occasion, and even when there is no occasion, they proclaim their own praises, and applaud their own performances. The attainment of wisdom, and the exercise of prudence, doubtless affords a strong temptation to pride and vain glory, which should always be checked by that modesty and humility which ought ever to be their inseparable attendants. Man is not conceited of that which is common to him with every body, but of that which is peculiar to him with some others. Wisdom is not an ordinary accomplishment: it is not in the possession of the multitude, but only in the hearts of a few. Such is the folly and vanity of the people here described, that, though destitute of this inestimable treasure, they were wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight, and arrogated to themselves those precious ornaments to which they have no just pretensions.—This also

was a frequent character among the Jews in the days of our prophet, and increased greatly until that people were carried captive to Babylon. They despised the counsels, the admonitions, and threatenings of the prophets: they rejected the word of the Lord, and walked, or rather wandered, in their own counsels. Hence the following charge is brought against them: ‘How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us*?’ Especially did persons of this sort abound in the days of our Saviour, prior to the destruction of the Jewish state by the Romans; of which the Pharisees were remarkable instances, who, notwithstanding they were blind, imagined they were wise, and saw clearly.—Be ye not then wise in your own eyes. ‘Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit, there is more hope of a fool than of him.’ We may entertain better hopes of making a foolish man wise, than of instructing a self-conceited creature. Many a one might have become wise, had they first been convinced that they were foolish; whereas supposed wisdom and knowledge effectually prevent the benefit of instruction. Wherefore, to use the words of the apostle Paul, ‘Be not wise in your own conceits †.’

22 Wo unto *them that are* mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink.

The sixth and last wo is denounced against those who are addicted to excess in the use of strong liquors.—Wine and strong drink, which produce similar effects upon mankind, are often used at the same time, and mentioned together in the prohibitions and directions respecting them which are delivered in scripture. It is recorded of the Rechabites, the Nazarites, and John the Baptist, that they

* See Jer. viii. 8, 9, 10.

† Rom. xii. 16.

drank neither wine nor strong drink. That from these remarkable instances of abstinence, men may not imagine that they ought to refrain from the moderate use of these excellent restoratives, we are required 'to give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine to those who are of heavy hearts *.' These, like every other creature of God, are in themselves good, and when properly used, conduce, through the divine blessing, to strengthen the body, and exhilarate the mind; and therefore when they can consistently be obtained, they ought to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. At banquets, at marriage-feasts, and other seasons of festivity, they constitute a considerable part of the entertainment, and are then commonly used with greater profusion than at other times; of which I could easily produce some instances from the sacred writings that are not to be condemned. The persons here threatened with misery and wo, are not those who take strong drink to refresh and strengthen them, but such as employ their strength and time in drinking intoxicating liquors, and exert themselves in swallowing large quantities of them, in order to get drunk. How contemptible, how criminal the practice here condemned, among creatures dignified with reason, plentifully supplied with every thing necessary to the comfort of life, and commanded, by the supreme authority of God, to be sober and temperate! How odious the indulgence in that practice, whereby men debilitate their faculties, enervate their constitutions, incapacitate themselves for business, condemn the law of God, and destroy what would prove a reviving cordial to the indigent, the weak, and distressed among their brethren!—Persons of this description abounded among the Jews, both at the period which preceded the captivity, and the destruction of their state, as appears from some passages of the writ-

* Prov. xxxi. 6.

ings of the prophets, and several of our Lord's discourses*.—Let those to whom this character belongs, seriously consider, that God who gave them strength to serve and please him, will certainly, and perhaps suddenly, make them feel that misery and woe which they have merited as their portion.

23 Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.

These words farther represent the odious character which is here threatened with misery and woe.—Those whom they justify, are the wicked, who, far from resisting temptation, and avoiding sin, surrender themselves to the practice of iniquity; and, notwithstanding the various methods employed to deter them from transgression, obstinately persist in committing the most enormous wickednesses. Though justly deserving, on account of such conduct, to be condemned, the persons described espouse their cause, approve of their ways, and pronounce them to have acted right; and thus uniformly decide in their favour, in direct opposition to justice and equity.—A circumstance is mentioned which greatly aggravated this crime; it was committed with a view to reward. Rewards are of two sorts. Those which are bestowed upon the well-deserving, who, by actions truly praiseworthy, have merited from others marks of esteem and gratitude. Such acknowledgments of obligations conferred, prove encouragements to well-doing, and ought to be received with pleasure and thankfulness. To act with a view to such recompences, as we apprehend, cannot be culpable. There are also rewards which are sometimes given with design to pervert the judgment, to blind the eyes, and to corrupt the exercise of justice. These last were strictly forbidden in the

* See Matth. xxiv. 49.

law of God; the acceptance of them is perfectly inconsistent with integrity; and acting under their influence is mentioned as a daring instance of impiety to which the Jews were addicted, at the time to which this prophecy refers. Destitute of good principles, regardless to the sacred rights of equity, their judgments were biassed, and their conduct regulated, by the prospect of advantage, or the reward they had already received. In the words of the prophet Amos, ‘They
 ‘ sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair
 ‘ of shoes. They panted after the dust of the earth
 ‘ on the head of the poor, and turned aside the way
 ‘ of the meek*.’

And take away the righteousness of the righteous from him. By the righteous, may be meant those who have received abundance of the gift of righteousness; who are sincere and upright in heart, equitable in their transactions, inoffensive in their conduct; who are righteous before God, walking in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless. The righteousness of such, the persons spoken of take away. Though they cannot deprive them of that righteousness which is unto all, and upon all them that believe; though they cannot deprive them of the good principles they possess, and the good conduct they exemplify; they do what is in their power for these purposes, by misrepresenting their character, by vilifying their actions, and endeavouring to undermine the justice of their cause. On these accounts, we suppose, the persons described had this heavy charge brought against them.—This odious character, like the others already mentioned, became very frequent in Judea, at the two remarkable periods to which the discourse in this chapter looked forward.—Thus the multiplied transgressions of the men of Judah increased their sorrows and calamities, and brought upon them all those repeated woes which are here de-

* Amos ii. 6, 7.

nounced. Such sins as these which we have had under our review, never fail to expose people to the righteous judgments of God, however great may have been their privileges and profession. After the church of Ephesus decayed from her first love, the church of Pergamos turned aside to the doctrine of Balaam; after the church of Thyatira followed the seductions of Jezebel, Laodicea became lukewarm, and the other Asiatic churches abated in their zeal; God removed the candlestick he had placed among them, and extinguished the light they had enjoyed. Let us then who think we stand, take heed lest we fall; and cautiously avoid those sins which have brought misery and ruin upon others.

24 Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, *so* their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the holy One of Israel.

The prophet now proceeds to declare more fully the punishment which God was about to inflict upon the Jewish people.—The language which he uses in this verse is highly figurative, and the similitude whereby he illustrates divine judgments is familiar and instructive. They are compared to fire and flame, which suddenly break forth in a moment, and blaze out unexpectedly, when no such thing is looked for. Like fire, they devour and consume all that comes within their reach: nothing can stand before them: they destroy the strongest fences, and lay in ruins the largest edifices. As fire and flame, when once burning with violence, is got under with the utmost difficulty, so divine judgments cannot be resisted, their direction cannot be altered, their force abated, nor can the flame be extinguished by human efforts. As threatened calamities cannot be averted, so inflicted judgments

judgments cannot be removed, unless by true repentance, and earnest supplication to the supreme Disposer of all events.—In this similitude, transgressors are intended by the stubble and the chaff, which the fire devours and consumes, to which they are very significantly compared. As the stubble and the chaff, whilst they continue united to the wheat, are useful for supporting and covering the grain, in like manner the wicked, when connected with good men, are sometimes subservient to their welfare, by affording them support and protection from danger. As stubble and chaff, when separated from the corn, are of little or no value, in this respect they are the image of the ungodly, who are often spoken of in scripture under this figure. ‘The heart of the wicked,’ saith Solomon, ‘is little worth * ;’ and if his noblest part is of no value, he must be an insignificant creature indeed. Stubble and chaff are light and trivial, having no real solidity; and so emphatically represent the vanity and unprofitableness of sinners, who are consumed, by divine judgments, as the lightest and driest fewel is suddenly devoured by the fire.

So their root shall be rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust. The posterity of Israel are here compared to a fruit-bearing tree, whose root gives it strength and stability, conveys to it nourishment, and preserves it firm amidst the storms to which it may be exposed. By their root, may be meant every thing whereby they thought to secure and establish themselves, such as their secret counsels, their deep-laid designs, their strength and riches, their friends and connections, from all which they derived support, and expected to keep their station. Viewing them in their social capacity, by their root, we may understand parents, heads of families, judges, governors, and princes, who give stability and support to the state, and preserve it in a flourishing condition.—

* Prov. x. 20.

Blossoms are the beautiful flowers which grow upon trees or plants, prognosticating plenty of fruits, and seeds in their season. Was the exprellion before us to be explained in its literal sense, the meaning would be simply this: Their trees should bear no fruit: their gardens, vineyards, and plantations, were to be destroyed, according as it is written, ‘Curst shalt thou be in the field* : not only shall thy cattle be weakly and barren, but thy fruit-trees shall be blasted. To give the strongest assurance of the certainty of this event, the prophet acquaints those to whom he delivered this message, that their more remote, as well as more immediate expectations were to be frustrated. It seems, however, more uniform and consistent with the figurative language used in this verse, to explain the words in their metaphorical sense. In this view, the blossoms denote the beautiful promising appearances among that people, which seemed to preface plenty of fruit; such as their religion, their children, their magnificence and influence as a nation: in short, every thing which constituted their excellence, and displayed their glory, was to be consumed.

With respect to these things it is foretold, that they shall be rottenness, and shall go up as dust. The expressions allude to the condition of a tree, whose root and blossoms being destroyed, is deprived of its beauty, use, and fruitfulness. This is a familiar manner of speaking frequently used by the sacred writers, of which I refer you to the two following instances. The first you may see, Amos ii. 9. where God saith concerning the Amorite, ‘He was strong as the oaks, yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.’ The other you will find in Hosea ix. 16. where the Most High thus speaks by the prophet, ‘Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit.’ And in the prediction before us, their root shall be rottenness: having in it no

* Deut. xxviii 16.

strength, firmness, or sap, it shall quickly consume away to nothing, and their blossom shall go up as dust;—all their promising appearances were soon to fade and vanish as the smoke, or the fine dust that arises from any dry thing that is rotten, when it is touched. The judgment which is here foretold, was to prove universal; for what remains of a tree when its roots and branches are destroyed. The mercy promised, Chap. xxxvii. 31. to the remnant that escaped of the house of Judah, is very great: ‘It shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward;’ and here the misery threatened is equally great, both root and blossoms were to be consumed. There is no security from the judgments of God: when he comes to take vengeance, strength and beauty perish at his rebuke.—The reasons are subjoined why the Almighty would execute these extensive judgments upon the house of Israel and Judah;

Because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts. By the oppression, injustice, luxury, drunkenness, pride, and perverseness, of which they were guilty, they contemned the sacred authority of that mighty Lord who mustereth the armies of battle, who numbers and orders all the hosts of heaven. By the law of the Lord, may be meant the lively oracles which were committed unto them, and particularly the testimonies and statutes which God made known to Israel, constituting one of those distinguishing prerogatives whereby that highly-favoured people were exalted above all other nations. The generous gift of such a perfect rule of conduct by the great Law-giver, for accomplishing the most benevolent purposes, laid them under peculiar obligations to honour him, to love his law, and to aspire after the honourable testimony which one of their own princes received from God: ‘My servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, and did that only which was right in mine eyes *.’ To this they

* 1 Kings xiv. 8.

had the highest encouragement they could have desired, as you may see, Lev. xviii. 5. 'Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.' Notwithstanding, like the Heathen who raged, and the people who imagined a vain thing, they broke God's bands asunder, and cast away his cords from them. 'Though he had written to them the great things of his law, they were counted as a strange thing *,' in which they had little or no concern; and between which, and their hearts and lives, there was little or no correspondence. They refused to yield the obedience it required, and made light of the solemn institutions which were therein appointed.

And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. If these words have a meaning different from the former, and contain not an illustration of the preceding article, but another, though similar reason, why the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people, we may understand them as signifying his word of promise, given unto the fathers; which the apostle Paul affirms, God fulfilled unto their children, by raising up Jesus Christ again from the dead †. This was the word which the Lord gave, and great was the company of those that published it ‡. This distinction between the word and the law of God seems to be marked, Psal. cxlvii. 19. where men are invited to praise the Lord, because, among other things, 'He hath shewed his word unto Jacob, and his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.' To express the great aggravations wherewith the sin of this people was attended, the word which they despised is said to be the word of the holy One of Israel, who hath a perfect detestation of all sin, especially the presumptuous transgressions of those by whom he ought to be sanctified, and with whom he vouchsafes to stand intimately connected. The word and promise of Jehovah they

* Hosea viii. 12. † See Acts xiii. 32, 33. ‡ Psal. lxxviii. 11.

wickedly contemned, and blasphemously rejected, though containing blessings of incomparable excellence, and given in tender compassion to his people, for accomplishing the most salutary purposes.—The wickedness with which the Jews are here charged, arrived at an enormous height at the time which preceded the Babylonish captivity *; and at the period which went before their extermination by the Romans, as we learn from the conclusion of the apostle Paul's discourse in the synagogue at Antioch: 'Seeing,' said that great man to the men of Israel 'ye put the word of God from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us †.' By rejecting the gospel, and despising the means of salvation, they justly exposed themselves to the severe judgments here threatened.—No wonder that the punishment of such despisers should be terrible and unavoidable. What madness and barbarity do they commit, who perversely reject their own happiness, and ruin themselves! Did we see condemned criminals trample under foot the pardon that was offered them; did we see sick people, languishing under dangerous diseases, throw away the only remedy which could cure them; did we see wretched captives rejecting with disdain the kind offer of freedom; or indigent beggars spurning at the liberal hand which reached them an alms; we would reckon them objects justly deserving pity and contempt. What shall we then say of the conduct of guilty, diseased, enslaved, indigent sinners, who wickedly reject and despise that mercy which would pardon and cure, liberate and enrich them! We only say at present, they richly deserve destruction. 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?'

25 Therefore is the anger of the LORD kindled against his people, and he hath stretched

* See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16, 17.

† Acts xiii. 46, 47.

forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them : and the hills did tremble, and their carcases *were* torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.

This verse contains a further description of the punishment which was to be inflicted upon the posterity of Jacob, on account of the sins above-mentioned.—It is extremely difficult to conceive, how the almighty God is affected by the good or bad conduct of men ; how he can be pleased or displeased with their actions. As his nature is unchangeable, without variableness, and shadow of turning, so his felicity is immutable, and cannot admit either of increase or diminution. Notwithstanding, he hath taught us to consider obedience to his will as highly acceptable to him ; and the transgression of his law as no less displeasing to him, and exposing to his wrath, which is here said to have been kindled against his people. Anger, indignation, wrath, and fury, are ascribed to God in scripture. Properly speaking, none of these angry passions are in the all-perfect Jehovah ; but they are attributed to him, when he acts in a manner somewhat similar to men, under the influence of these affections. There is no change in him, but in his dispensations toward his people, when his anger, here compared to fire, is kindled against them. The anger of God, like fire, which is the most terrible of all the elements, is the most dreadful attribute of Jehovah ; and when kindled and blown up into a flame, by the presumptuous, persisted-in transgressions of men, it burns with vehemence, until it consume both root and branch.—This wrath of the Lord is said ‘ to be kindled against his people,’ whom he had appropriated to himself as his peculiar treasure, whom he had distinguished from all other nations by the most excellent prerogatives, and who professed themselves devoted to his service and obedience. Their wickedness became greatly aggravated by the

privileges which they abused, in so much that when God declared, by the prophet, that he would plead with them, he thus speaks; ‘ Pass over the isles of Chittim, and see, and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory, for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord *.’ So enormous were their crimes, that they were unparalleled among other nations; and therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against them.—Beware, my friends, of kindling the wrath of the Most High, of which none knoweth the power, what it can do, and how far it may go. Cordially embrace the Son of God, and yield him the most humble and dutiful homage, lest he be angry, and ye perish when his wrath is kindled but a little.

And he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them. By the hand of God, is here meant, as in many other places of scripture, his mighty power, whereby he punishes incorrigible sinners, and executes upon them righteous vengeance. This hand of the Lord is said to be stretched out, ready for immediate exertion, that he may inflict deserved judgments upon transgressors. These he sometimes dispenses by the intervention of instruments, which he employs for this purpose: hence the wicked are called, God’s hand †. At other times, he sends unexpected calamities upon a person or people, which come immediately from himself, whilst he acts without the instrumentality of the creature; many instances of which occur in the course of divine providence.—*And hath smitten them.* God is said to smite, when he afflicts with terror, with famine, with pestilence, with the sword, with diseases and death:

* Jer. ii. 10, 11, 12.

† Psal. xvii. 14.

in all these various ways, he is said to have smitten transgressors. The expression is used in the book of Exodus, with respect to the destructive plagues wherewith God visited the Egyptians: 'I will stretch out my hand (said he to his servant Moses), and smite Egypt with all my wonders *.' The stroke to which the prophet here refers, was a very severe one, and reached to old and young, to great and small. The Almighty required Israel, when they took a city, to smite every male with the edge of the sword, and to spare the women, the little ones, and the cattle †. Whereas when God reached that terrible blow to the posterity of Israel, which is here spoken of, no age, sex, or condition whatsoever, was exempted from feeling the effects of the out-stretched arm of Jehovah. The hoary head of the aged, the tenderness of the children, the tears of the mothers, the beauty of the maids, the wisdom of the prudent, the power of the great, the eloquence of the orator, could not procure deliverance from the stroke of divine vengeance wherewith they were smitten.—The consequences were,

And the hills did tremble. Similar expressions to this frequently occur in scripture, in which those actions are attributed to inanimate creatures, which, properly speaking, are peculiar to those only which are endowed with life. The words seem to allude to the tremour occasioned by the stroke of the workman's hammer upon some hard body; and, in their lowest sense, intimate the great effects which were to be produced by the powerful arm of Jehovah stretched to smite his people. Viewing the hills in the figurative sense, in which they are often mentioned in the prophetic writings, they denote great men, conspicuous on account of their eminent station, and distinguished dignity. As in the disposition of this earth, the great Creator made some places of it

* Exod. iii. 20.

† See Deut. xx. 13, 14.

plain and low, others high and mountainous, so in like manner he hath formed society. Some men stand upon level ground, in the middle ranks; others are situated in a low and depressed condition, like the valley and meadow grounds; whilst a few, like hills and mountains, are elevated far above those around them. Such were to be the extensive effects of God's finiting his people, that persons of the highest rank, emperors, kings, and princes, were to be struck with dread and trembling, at the sudden unexpected approach of the terrible judgments which the hand of God would inflict.

And their carcases were torn in the midst of the streets. Those who were to fall victims to the impending destruction, were to be deprived of the benefit of a decent burial, which is generally esteemed a desirable privilege. Their dead bodies were to be barbarously treated by their cruel enemies, and exposed as a prey to the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, by whom they should be mangled and devoured.—If the divine judgments here mentioned, were executed at the time this prophecy was delivered, they must have been those which befell the Jews in the days of Ahaz, of which we read, 2 Kings xxviii. 6, 7, 17, 18. *et seq.* Some of the neighbouring princes and states, with their great men, then tottered and fell: the king of Assyria overthrew the kingdom of Syria, and greatly weakened Ephraim. If the prophecy looked forward, as I rather suppose, to times which were then at a great distance, it may relate to the calamities which were inflicted upon the Jews at the destruction of their state by the Romans, which was attended with great commotions among various empires and states.—Be admonished then to stand in awe of God's righteous judgments. Though we see them not, though we feel them not, the information we receive concerning them, ought to excite in our minds a holy fear and dread. This proper effect the awful threatenings fulminated against the old world

world produced in Noah, the preacher of righteousness, as affirmed by the apostle, writing to the Hebrews: ‘By faith Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house*.’ Surely if we ought to stand in awe of threatened judgments, we ought to fear and glorify God on account of his judgments already made manifest, especially when the following words are subjoined:—*For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* After a man hath been greatly incensed, and hath severely punished the objects of his displeasure, his wrath commonly begins to subside, and he ceases farther to exert himself for their correction. His anger then seems to be turned away. It was otherwise here. Notwithstanding the above dreadful threatenings which God had denounced against his people, his displeasure was not abated: his hand which was stretched out to smite, he still retained in that posture, in immediate readiness farther to afflict them, for those complicated transgressions from which they would not desist. These words are thrice repeated in the ninth, and once in the tenth chapter of this prophecy, where the truth of them is fully evinced by the connection in which they stand.

26 ¶ And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly.

In this and the following verses, we are acquainted with some circumstances relative to the forces which the Almighty was to employ in smiting his people for their sins.—He was to convene them speedily, by erecting a standard for this purpose, and by calling them to his service, so as to give them intimation of

* Heb. xi. 7.

his pleasure. Ensigns are military banners or standards, which, when lifted up, were anciently intended for raising armies, and collecting men together for warlike employments, and to these the soldiers were accustomed to resort. To this practice of princes and generals, who, when they wished speedily to raise an army upon any emergency, used to erect a standard on some hill or rising ground, the expression before us seems plainly to allude. The Lord of hosts, the Prince of the kings of the earth, by this means, was about to assemble quickly a numerous army from a great distance, to execute the purposes he had in view to accomplish.—*And will hiss unto them from the end of the earth.* In scripture, persons are said to hiss, as an expression of derision and contempt. The distressed state of Jerusalem is in this manner described; ‘All they that pass by thee, clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth *?’ This, however, is not the meaning of the word in the verse under consideration. The hissing here spoken of, is given as a sign or call to the people to whom it is directed, to march immediately to the work assigned them. The phrase, which is repeatedly used by our prophet, probably alludes to the custom of collecting bees into the hive, by means of a sort of hissing noise. It imports, that the God of the whole earth would speedily collect, by certain intimations of his pleasure, a vast army, to execute vengeance upon his perfidious, rebellious people. The scoffers among them had said in derision, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and lo, here their desire is granted. The people who were to perform this service, were to march with much haste and speed out of kingdoms very remote from Judea: they were to come from far, from the ends of the earth; first from Chaldea, and afterward

* Lam. ii. 15.

from the Roman empire, both of which kingdoms were situated at a great distance from Canaan. Hezekiah told our prophet, that the messengers concerning whom he inquired, came from a far country, even from Babylon*. And the Romans may as justly be said to have come from far, when, with surprising rapidity, they marched toward Jerufalem, to destroy it, according to prophecy.—Hence we learn, that the eternal God is the great Agent, who sends unto cities and kingdoms all the terrible judgments wherewith they are visited. Nebuchadnezzar king of Assyria, Titus the Roman emperor, with great armies, went against Jerufalem; but they acted only in obedience to the orders they received from God. In his hand they were only as the rod and staff, wherewith he beat his disobedient people; the axe, wherewith he hewed them; and therefore they might thus have upbraided those whom they punished: At the command of Jehovah, we desolate your country, and burn your city, because you refused to yield obedience to his commands, by which you might have prevented these calamities.

27 None shall be weary nor stumble amongst them: none shall slumber nor sleep: neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken.

These words represent the indefatigable diligence, the constant vigilance, and wonderful alacrity, of the armies which God was to march against the Jewish nation.—They were not to be weary or faint, through the length of their journey; they were not to stumble, through the roughness of the roads by which they were to pass; neither were they to lose any time in unnecessary sleep; but, with the utmost readiness and activity, they were to execute the orders of Jehovah.

* 2 Kings. xx. 14.

Nor was this to be the practice only of some of the stoutest of them, but it was to be their conduct in general, with few or no exceptions.—*Neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed.* They were to be in a state of continual readiness for actual service, and no impediments were to retard their progress. Military girdles or belts, girt about the loins, were considered anciently, among eastern nations, as a part of a soldier's accoutrements: hence girding, or putting on the girdle, was an expression used to denote preparation for war, or for a long journey. Thus we read, that ‘when the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, or every one that girt himself with a girdle*.’ The girdles of those who are spoken of, were not to be loosed, or laid aside, until the great purposes for which they had been put on were effectuated: they were always to be prepared for action, until they had accomplished the designs for which they were armed.—*Nor the latchet of their shoes be broken.* A very minute circumstance this to be entered into the record of God. It seems intended, to intimate the remarkable speed with which the troops here described, were to advance to the execution of the work assigned them, and that they were to meet with little or no interruption in their progress.—Hereby we are instructed in the obvious and important truth, That the Lord is the Governor among the nations, and that he hath the absolute command of all the inhabitants of the earth. He calls them forth at what time, and to what services he sees proper to assign them. In the course of his universal providence, he conducts armies from their own territories into distant countries, that they may do him service, and speedily execute righteous vengeance upon transgressors, whose enormous crimes accelerate divine judgments. and give speed and success to the instruments

* 2 Kings iii. 21.

employed against them by the King of nations. Let us reverence this mighty God, whose kingdom ruleth over all. ‘Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest*.’

28 Whose arrows *are* sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind.

In this verse, the military instruments of the armies, who were to march into Judea, are described as ready for use; and the astonishing expedition with which they were to advance to the service is strongly represented.—The arrow is a small weapon made of wood, pointed with iron or flint, and in ancient times was used as an instrument of war. Its name, in the Hebrew language, is derived from a word which signifies *to cut* or *wound*, this being the end for which it is made, and used in battle. That they might effectually execute these purposes, they are here affirmed to be sharp.—*And all their bows bent*; quite ready for shooting the arrows they had sharpened, that thereby they might make terrible devastation among those whom they attacked.—*Their horses hoofs shall be counted like flint*. You know, it is one of the chief properties of a good horse, to have a hard hoof. The firmness and solidity of the hoof must have been of still more importance to a fine horse among the ancients, who seem to have been unacquainted with shoeing horses, by nailing iron-plates to their hoofs, as practised in modern times. When, therefore, the hoofs of the Babylonian and Roman cavalry are foretold to be hard, and difficult to break, like a flint-stone, upon which the weather, and the stones, make no impression, the phrase intimates, their

* Rev. xv. 4.

ability and readiness to perform the long march which they were to make into Judea.—*And their wheels like a whirlwind.* This wind is remarkable for coming very suddenly, for running with great rapidity in a circular motion, and with such violence as to carry every thing before it that lies in the way. The chariots, drawn by the horses above described, were to resemble a whirlwind, on account of their sudden and unexpected appearance in Judea; for, as the prophet Jeremiah foretold, ‘The spoiler was suddenly to come upon them *,’ and overthrow them. Like a whirlwind, their motion was to be swift and rapid: hence the Chaldean horses are compared, by the prophet Habakkuk, to leopards †, which are exceeding swift creatures; a circumstance this which was of great consequence to the success of their enterprise. Alexander, called the *Great*, being asked, How he conquered the world in so short a time? replied, By not delaying. The wheels of the chariots, like a whirlwind, also were to do great execution. Very terrible have been the effects of a tempest: ships at sea have foundered, or been dashed to pieces; stately buildings have been shattered; the largest trees have been split in pieces, and the strongest houses have been demolished. In like manner, those who invaded Judea, spread, with irresistible violence, desolation and ruin wherever they went.—This remarkable prediction, with its exact accomplishment, by the Babylonians and Romans, furnishes us with an invincible argument for the unlimited power of God, in the firm belief of which we ought to be established. All times, all nations, and all things, are subject to his jurisdiction and control, whose name alone is Jehovah, the Most High over all the earth. He is exalted far above all gods, potentates, and princes, and sends their troops whithersoever he pleases, to execute his purposes, and to punish the sins of his perfidious people.

* Jer. vi. 26.

† Hab. i. 8.

29 Their roaring *shall be* like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry *it* away safe, and none shall deliver *it*.

The boldness and fortitude, the strength and contempt of danger, the ferocity of disposition, and love of prey, possessed by the people who were sent against the men of Judah, are here represented by a strong comparison.—Beside vigilance, labour, discipline, activity, and military weapons, fortitude, bravery, and the love of glory, are highly necessary to success in war. These qualifications the armies spoken of, were to possess in an eminent degree.—*Their roaring was to be like that of a lion.* The great noise they were to make, when seizing upon their prey, is significantly compared to the roaring of a lion, which is said to be the strongest, and among the fiercest and most rapacious of wild beasts. So loud and tremendous is his roaring, that some have affirmed, that the other beasts of the forests tremble and fall down at the hideous noise, which renders them an easy prey. Wicked tyrants, powerful and cruel men, are frequently compared to lions in scripture, because they resemble these creatures in their rapacity, love of prey, and other savage dispositions. ‘As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear, so is a wicked ruler over the poor people*.’ And in the verse before us, the hideous noise made by fierce and inflexible troops, when spreading desolation through Judea, and seizing upon the spoils, is foretold to resemble the roaring of the lion, and that of the young lions.—To intimate their success in pillaging that devoted country, it is added, *They shall carry away the prey safe, and none shall deliver it.* There were many among the men of Judah who had spoiled and oppressed the poor; and, therefore, as a just recompence of that, and their other enormous crimes, those who

* Prov. xxviii. 15.

were to be employed in executing upon them righteous judgment, were to carry away their spoil as a prey. Nor were there to be any deliverer, to rescue out of the hand of their victorious enemy, the spoils they had gathered among the vanquished. Blessed God, defend us from the horrors of war, and preserve us from becoming a prey to our enemies; and, above all, save us, we beseech thee, from those transgressions which expose to these dreadful calamities.—The predictions contained in this, and the two foregoing verses, were remarkably verified at the invasion of Judea, by the Assyrians: concerning whom the Lord thus speaks, by the prophet Jeremiah; ‘Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say*.’ Afterward these predictions were more fully accomplished by the Romans, who excelled all other nations in military discipline, in expedition and bravery; and, in various respects, resembled a lion, to which they are here compared. All the circumstances mentioned, have a remarkable correspondence to those which attended their march into Judea, when they spread universal desolation over all that land.

30 And in that day they shall roar against them, like the roaring of the sea: and if *one* look unto the land, behold darkness *and* sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

The prophet concludes this prophecy, by representing the distress and anguish with which the foretold calamities should be accompanied.—The invasion of the land of Judah, and the sacking of the city Jerusalem, was to be attended with despair on the part of the besieged.—*In that day.* In that remarkable period in which the above-mentioned predictions were

* Jer. v. 15.

to be accomplished, the mournful scene, described in this verse, was to be exhibited. The great and powerful armies which were collected by divine command, were to march into Judea with irresistible impetuosity, and an awful noise, resembling that of the sea after a hard gale of wind. The noise made by a great military force, is significantly compared to the roaring of the sea, Jer. l. 42. where the army of Cyrus is foretold to have a voice like that noisy element. The comparison is truly sublime, and serves to assist us in forming proper ideas of the subject of which the prophet speaks.

And if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow. Did any of those who survived the general destruction of the Jewish nation, look toward the land they once possessed as their inheritance, they could see nothing but darkness, distress, and grief, the miserable effects of the deplorable condition to which it was reduced by complicated calamities. Memorable are the words of our Saviour to this purpose: ‘ Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth *.’ Feeling the stings of conscience, and the most bitter remorse, arising from a sense of guilt; perceiving themselves to be the objects of divine displeasure, the contempt and reproach of the world; every thing would appear dismal, and prove a fresh occasion of sorrow.

And the light is darkened in the heavens thereof. Great public calamities, and their effects, are described, by the prophets, as if the order of the universe was reversed, as if the ordinances of heaven and earth were changed. A remarkable instance of this you will find recorded, Jer. iv. 23. and following verses; where the prophet elegantly represents, in beautiful, figurative language, the dismal consequences of the

* Luke. xxi. 25, 26.

land of Israel being spoiled. I will read to you the passage, being one of those I much admire, as peculiarly sublime. ‘I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void: and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger.’ The words before us, like those which I have now read, intimate the great and affecting alterations which were to be made by the judgments of God upon the Jews; and, therefore, to give them a just interpretation, they must be explained in their metaphorical sense. In this view, by the light which was to be converted into darkness in the Jewish hemisphere, is meant the glorious prerogatives which they enjoyed; and the most eminent persons in their church and state, who, in prophetic language, are called the sun, the moon, and the stars, which enlightened, directed, and comforted the people. The glory of God, which filled their temple, and illuminated the church, was removed. The ceremonial law, which afforded them a lively representation of future good things, was abolished, and ceased to give them farther light. The doctors and teachers in their church were greatly degenerated, and their light was nearly extinguished. The honour of their law, and the glory of their priesthood, were covered with obscurity. Thus the light was darkened in the heavens thereof.—To this forlorn state the Jewish nation was reduced, after its overthrow by the Romans. The history of that people verifies the truth, in general, of all the prophecies; and particularly the predictions we have now been considering, in which God gave them timely advertisement of approaching calamities. These were not inflicted until a considerable time after they had previously received repeated warn-

ings

ings of their approach. The Lord of hosts ordered the trumpet to be blown long before he called the nations forth to battle; and commanded his servants to inform the men of Judah, that desolation and destruction, darkness and sorrow, would overtake them, did they persist in their evil ways. Notwithstanding these faithful admonitions, they went on from evil to worse, until wrath came upon them to the uttermost, on account of their many aggravated iniquities.— Hence we learn, that the prosperity and happiness of the most flourishing kingdoms upon earth is not perpetual, but subject to change; that the wickedness of a people provokes God to turn a fruitful land into barrenness. This it is which darkens the light in the heavens, and reverses their former condition. Would we then endeavour to perpetuate our felicity as a nation, let us bring forth fruit unto God, corresponding to the inestimable advantages we enjoy.

To conclude, let the word of God dwell richly in your hearts, and hold it forth uniformly in your lives. Add commentary to commentary, exposition to exposition. To the comment I give you in words, as the fruit of my studies, add your comment of good works, as the effect of your knowledge and faith. To my exposition of this prophecy, executed at the expence of much time and labour, add your exposition, by the sanctity of your lives, and purity of your manners. In this manner, grant me, I beseech you, similar occasion to glory on your behalf, with that which the apostle Paul acknowledged the Corinthians had given him, in these memorable words; ‘Ye (saith he) are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: for as much as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart*.’

* 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE are now arrived at the fourth part of the prophetic discourse, contained in the first twelve chapters of these prophecies; wherein Isaiah narrates a memorable vision with which he was favoured, representing to him the glorious kingdom of the Son of God, with some remarkable circumstances attending its extension over the whole world, which are highly worthy of the most elaborate investigation. The short discourse comprehended in this chapter, consists of three parts. First, A sublime description of the symbolical appearance of the glorious majesty of God, with some particular circumstances which accompanied this manifestation, ver. 1.—4. Secondly, The solemn designation of Isaiah to the performance of a very important part of his prophetic office, to which God had appointed him; namely, the publishing a general declaration respecting the future fortunes of his people, ver. 5.—7. And lastly, The particular order which the prophet received from God, to deliver a very grievous message, which he was instructed to communicate to the Jewish nation, which were to be made an awful instance of the divine severity, ver. 8.—13.

 C H A P. VI.

IN the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

The time wherein Isaiah was honoured with the vision of which he here speaks, was the year in which king Uzziah died.—This prince was elevated to
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the throne of Judah when he was sixteen years of age, and reigned in Jerufalem during the long period of fifty and two years. In the beginning of his reign, he did that which was right in the fight of the Lord: and as long as he fought the Lord, God made him to prosper. Being wonderfully helped until he was strong, his fame fpread far abroad; and in war, his arms were crowned with fuccefs. In his prosperity, however, his heart was lifted up, to his deftruction: he tranfgreffed againft the Lord his God. He went into the temple of the Lord, and burnt incenfe upon the altar of incenfe, notwithstanding the powerful oppofition of fourfcore priests, who remonftrated againft this ufurpation of their office, and informed the king of his fin, and his danger. In confequence of this rash attempt, God fmote him with leprofy, and he continued a leper unto the day of his death. About that period, our prophet informs us, he faw the vifion which he proceeds to narrate. The circumftance of time, which is feldom mentioned by Ifaiah, but more frequently noticed by the other prophets, is here clearly determined. Though we pretend not to afign the true reafons why this representation was given at the time here marked, doubtlefs, were we acquainted with them, the wifdom and goodnefs of the divine procedure, in this matter, would appear highly confpicuous. We fhall not, however, venture even a conjecture upon this topic, nor trouble you with thofe which have been formed by others.

I faw alfo the Lord. Of all the human fenfes, that of feeing is the moft active and penetrating, and carries along with it the moft powerful conviction of the reality and certainty of the objects that are feen. Hence the apoftle John, asserting his full affurance of the truth of thofe things concerning which he writes, ufes this ftrong expreffion, ‘That which we have feen with our eyes, which we have looked upon; that which we have feen and heard, declare we unto you *.’ In

* 1 John i. 1. 3.

what manner Iſaiah ſaw the moſt high God, the King eternal, immortal, and inviſible, he does not inform us. God being a Spirit, he cannot be ſeen with bodily eyes; being infinite and incomprehenſible, he cannot properly be ſeen with the eyes of the mind; and therefore the apoſtle Paul affirms, that ‘no man hath ſeen, or can ſee him.’ The words before us, certainly import more than that he ſaw the Lord by meditation and contemplation, which is the common privilege of all the ſervants of God; and, in this ſenſe, our prophet no doubt ſet the Lord always before him. We ſuppoſe, then, that he had a ſymbolical representation afforded him of the glory of Jehovah, in which the objects he proceeds to deſcribe, were as clearly exhibited to his view as if he had beheld them with his bodily eyes. In this manner, the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, and the apoſtle John, had the viſions of God which they relate. We are indeed altogether uncertain how the Lord made himſelf known to our prophet upon this occaſion, in this viſion; whether the appearance he mentions, was open to public view; whether he was in a deep ſleep, like Daniel; or in a trance, like the apoſtle Peter; or if, like the apoſtle Paul, he was ſo raviſhed with the ſight, that he knew not whether he was in or out of the body.—Bleſſed be God that we all with open face, may behold as in a glaſs the glory of the Lord. The revelation which God hath given us of himſelf in Jeſus Chriſt, far excels all the viſions with which the prophets were favoured ſince the beginning of the world. The light which they beheld, was obſcurity, when compared to that which we enjoy: their viſions were only ſhadows, and faint representations, of the glory we contemplate in the goſpel. God is manifeſt in the fleſh, and the true light now ſhineth; and therefore we ought to walk as children of the light, and of the day.

The perſon who was ſeen by the prophet, is the Lord Jehovah, glorious in holineſs, perfect in beauty, rich in mercy, infinite in majeſty, excellent in
working,

working, fearful in praises, and incomprehensible in all his divine attributes: the God of Israel, the God of the spirits of all flesh, to whom belongs the earth, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein; who, in the 5th verse of this chapter, is called the King, the Lord of hosts. By comparing the words before us with those of the apostle John, recorded Chap. xii. 40, 41. of his gospel, you will plainly see, that this person whom Isaiah calls Jehovah, the apostle affirms to have been Jesus Christ; for after having cited the 9th verse of this chapter, he adds, ‘These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.’ The words *his* and *him* plainly refer to our blessed Saviour, in whom the Jews did not believe, notwithstanding he had done many miracles among them. This remark of an inspired writer would have greatly embarrassed us, had not Jesus Christ himself resolved the difficulty, by this assurance, ‘He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father:’ the reason he elsewhere suggests is this, ‘I am in the Father, and the Father in me *:’ and again, ‘I and the Father are one †.’ Hence we conclude, that the glory of Jehovah, which Isaiah beheld, was the glory of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is one with him, by such a perfect unity as we pretend not to illustrate. This glorious person, we suppose, was he into whose presence the elders of Israel were admitted, when they saw God, and did eat and drink ‡. This was the Angel of the Lord, who appeared to Moses in the bush which burned, and was not consumed §§; who spake to him at Mount Sinai; who was in the church in the wilderness, whose glory was visible from between the cherubims §. This was the Lord whom Israel fought; the Messenger of the covenant, in whom they delighted, who suddenly came to his temple.—The sacred name of Jehovah being here applied to Jesus

* John xiv. 9. 11. † John x. 30. ‡ Exod. xxiv. 10.
 §§ Exod. iii. 2. § Acts vii. 38.

Christ, authorizes us to make this obvious inference, That God is our Saviour, and that our Saviour is God; and therefore able to save to the uttermost.

Sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. A throne is the ensign of royalty, and the seat of majesty, from whence princes display their grandeur, receive the addresses and petitions of their subjects, and enact laws for their benefit and government. The throne here mentioned, is an emblem of his divine majesty who was seated upon it, who is the Prince of the kings of the earth, by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice. It intimates his royal dignity, who is crowned with glory and honour, who hath a sceptre of righteousness, a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages, shall serve, and ten thousand times ten thousand of glorious attendants. It represents his ineffable glory, who is the King and the Lord of glory, the glory of heaven and earth, the glory of the church, whose works, whose law, liberty, and gospel, are all truly glorious. It likewise denotes his judicial authority, whose throne is set for judgment; and who, at the very time in which the prophet had this vision, sat in judgment upon the inhabitants of Judea, and pronounced that sentence which comprehended in it the most terrible calamities.—The Lord was seen sitting upon the throne. The expression is plainly metaphorical, and hath an obvious reference to earthly monarchs, who are seated upon their thrones. This posture represents the Most High in a state of grandeur and magnificence, highly exalted above all; of perfect ease and tranquillity, in the management of all the concerns of his universal empire; of complete security, amidst all the machinations of his enemies; and denotes the perpetuity of his dominion, which shall never have an end. He sits upon the throne of his glory, upholding all things by the word of his power, sending forth his ministers to execute his pleasure, subduing the people under him, giving gifts to his church, restraining the fury of his enemies, and dis-

appointing

appointing their hostile designs.—The throne upon which Jehovah appeared, was high and lifted up; signifying, that he who sat thereon, was elevated far above all might and dominion, and every name that is named in this world, or that which is to come. His kingdom ruleth over all. Inanimate creation is obedient to his command: to devils, and wicked men, he sets restraining bounds: angels who excel in strength, do his commandments: his faithful subjects among men, a multitude which no man can number, he governs, enriches, and preserves, in the enjoyment of the most glorious prerogatives.—With humility and reverence we bow before thy eternal throne, and give thee homage, rejoicing that thou the Lord God omnipotent reignest; and in our safety and felicity, under thy mild administration, who waits to be gracious, who art ready to supply us with strength, to guide us with counsel, to protect us by thy omnipotent arm, and to grant us inheritance among thy saints in light.

And his train filled the temple. Heavenly objects are so ineffably grand, that, in our present, imperfect, feeble state, we can at most understand them but very imperfectly. They must therefore be presented to view in a light in which we are capable to apprehend them, and be described in a manner suited to our limited capacities. Of this we have an instance in the words before us. The train here mentioned, I suppose, consisted not in the retinue, or numerous attendants, who surrounded the throne of God, but in somewhat resembling a loose, flowing garment, affording an emblem of the divine perfections, of the consummate dignity, and supreme majesty of Jehovah. The ideas of the presence and glory of God, conveyed by this vision, are borrowed from royal majesty, as displayed by eastern monarchs; and refer to sensible images well-known to those who were acquainted with the temple of old. In the exercise of the divine government, the Lord of hosts displays supreme authority, irresistible
power,

power, immaculate purity, consummate goodness, untainted righteousness, exquisite wisdom, incomparable magnificence, and boundless grace. Like a beautiful train, which adds dignity and splendour to the person who wears it, these give lustre, brilliancy, and glory, to the divine administration, and ought ever to excite our admiration and reverence. Similar figurative representations of the Almighty often occur in the holy scriptures; of which you may see an instance, Psal. xciii. 1. where the royal psalmist thus speaks, when describing the majesty, power, and holiness of God's kingdom: 'The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with majesty, the Lord is clothed with strength wherewith he hath girded himself.'

This train filled the temple. There are three temples wherein God is said in scripture to reside; his dwelling place in heaven, the temple at Jerusalem, and the humble heart. The first of these, which is always filled with the presence and glory of Jehovah, does not seem to be the temple of which our prophet speaks. As to the temple of Jerusalem, you know, it was exceeding magnificent, contrived by infinite wisdom, which formed the plan; in executing of which, above one hundred and fifty-three thousand workmen were employed for several years; and therein were performed the most solemn exercises of divine worship instituted among the posterity of Israel. It is dignified in scripture with various honourable descriptions; such as, 'the house of the Lord*', the holy and beautiful house †, the place in which God put his name ‡, the 'resting-place of Jehovah §, the temple of the Lord §. Such was the glory of this wonderful structure, that the fame thereof reached unto all countries. In the place called the holy of holies, contained within this house, did the God of Israel graciously vouchsafe to manifest himself, in a peculiar manner, to the high

* Eccles. v. 1. † Isaiah lxiv. 11. ‡ 1 Kings viii. 29.
 † 2 Chron. vi. 41. § Jer. vii. 4.

priest, who went in thither once in the year. This temple, in our prophet's view, was filled with the train of Jehovah.—This temple of God, honoured with his presence and worship, afforded an instructive type and representation of the church of Jesus Christ, favoured with his presence, in which the sacred institutions of divine worship are observed. Hence, like the temple of old, it is called the house of God; and Christians, of which it is constituted, are said to be the temple of the living God. If then you consider the temple here mentioned, in its figurative sense, the prophet had a vision of the kingdom of the Son of God, under the New Testament, which was to be filled with his glory. Under the former dispensation, the presence of God was confined to the temple at Jerusalem, where he resided in a special manner, and received the homage of his people; whereas now, under the gospel, the temple of the Most High is greatly enlarged, and God hath his habitation in all places in which his saints reside, and his name is recorded. The beautiful train of his divine excellencies filleth every humble heart, and every worshipping assembly, throughout his widely extended empire. This was the grand object, I suppose, which this vision was intended to represent.—Let Christians then, who are the temple of God, highly prize, and earnestly seek to enjoy, the comfortable presence of Jehovah. For this purpose, be solicitous to have your hearts adorned with every divine grace, that they may be fit habitations for God, through the Spirit; and take heed that you defile not the temple of God, which is holy.

2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

There is a remarkable similarity in the manifestations of the divine glory, which God afforded his servants

wants the prophets, though there was considerable variety in the appearances which they contemplated. Micah, the son of Imlah, ‘ saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him, on his right hand and on his left *.’ Daniel beheld the ‘ Ancient of days sitting on his throne, which was like the fiery flame.—Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him †.’ Our prophet says, that, in his view, above the throne stood the seraphims, &c. In these words, he describes the attendants of Jehovah: he acquaints us with their name, their station, their posture, their figure, and employment.—Their name is *seraphim*, which is derived from a Hebrew word that signifies *to burn*; and intimates, that the celestial spirits, who attend the throne of God, are creatures remarkable for the excellency and simplicity of their nature, their untainted purity, their ardent zeal for the glory of God, their vivacity and activity in executing the commands of Jehovah. Hence the royal psalmist celebrates the praises of God, who maketh his angels spirits: his ministers a flame of fire ‡.—These seraphims, in our prophet’s view, to whom they appeared in an elevated station, seemed to be above the throne; not surely upon the top of it, as ornaments, but behind it, exalted above its level, after the manner of those who are in waiting upon kings and princes.—These living creatures appeared in a standing posture, highly proper for the servants of the most high God, who are in continual readiness to execute the orders of their great Lord, for the benefit of his church.—With respect to their figure, each one had six wings. We presume not to pry into the nature of angels, nor to assign the reasons why they have appeared to men in such and such forms. Their nature, and the forms which they have occasionally assumed, far transcend our limited capacities, which are

* 1 Kings xxii. 19. † Daniel vii. 9, 10. ‡ Psal. civ. 4.

inadequate to the comprehension of the smallest insect; and therefore it becomes us to speak of seraphims with great modesty and diffidence. These here mentioned, probably resembled, in some respects, those which were seen by the prophet Ezekiel, which he thus describes: ‘They had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.—As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps*.’ The cherubims which were anciently in the temple, had only two wings; those whom Ezekiel saw, had four; whereas the seraphims seen by Isaiah, had six wings. The different purposes for which they were used are mentioned in the following words:

With twain he covered his face; thus expressing his profound reverence, and becoming modesty, in the divine presence. We can hardly approach those who are greatly our superiors but with down-cast eyes, intimating the consciousness we feel of their pre-eminence, and our profound respect for their excellence and dignity. We cannot look at the sun, when shining with meridian splendour, but we are obliged to cover our eyes with our hands. Such is the infinite glory of the eternal Jehovah, that celestial spirits, around his throne, appeared to our prophet, covering their faces with their wings. Light inaccessible, and full of glory, in which God resides, was too strong for them directly to contemplate. This circumstance instructs us, that all our approaches to God ought to be accompanied with great reverence and humility, deeply sensible not only of the infinite distance there is between God and us, as he is the Creator, and we the creatures of his power, but strongly affected with the still more awful distance that is between him and us, as he is the most holy God, and we sinful dust and ashes.—*With twain he covered his feet.* In scripture-

* See Ez. k. i. 5.—14.

language, the feet sometimes denotes all the lower parts of the body, which decency requires to be concealed. In eastern countries, these were generally covered by the long garments which they were accustomed to wear: hence it may have been thought want of respect, to appear in public, on solemn occasions, with the feet uncovered. In reference to this opinion, which was probably adopted by our prophet and his countrymen, the seraphims which he beheld, testified their profound reverence and humility in the divine presence, by covering their feet. This inculcates upon us the same important lesson with the former article.—*And with twain he did fly*, to execute with the utmost speed the commands he received from his highest Lord. You reckon that a bullet shot from a musket flies with great velocity; and no doubt it does, for, according to some calculations, did it continue in the same rapid motion with which it flies off, it would go one hundred and eighty miles in the hour. Celestial spirits move with incomparably greater velocity, in performing the services assigned them. Of this you may be sensible, by considering the immense distance between the throne of God in the highest heavens, and this earth, where they are often employed in ministering to the heirs of salvation. This circumstance ought to animate us to perform every part of the service of God with alacrity and dispatch, that, in this as well as other respects, our obedience may in some measure resemble the obedience of the angels in heaven. After the example of David, let us make haste, and not delay to keep all the commandments of God.

3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts, the whole earth *is* full of his glory.

These words farther describe the employment of the seraphims.—We pretend not to explain in what manner these heavenly intelligences communicate their

their sentiments to one another. According to our prophet's description, they were engaged in celebrating, with loud exclamations, the praises of Jehovah. In this sublime exercise, they seemed to him to form a sound in the air, which reached his ears; or somewhat resembling it, which affected his imagination. To this delightful work they were summoned by the inspired royal psalmist, and called upon to lift up their voices, and sing, together with the whole creation, a hymn of thanksgiving to his honour, who is the praise of all his saints: 'Praise the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights: praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts*.' To this call they yield the most cheerful obedience; an instance of which is recorded, Luke ii. 13, 14. where we read, 'That suddenly there was with the angel (who published the nativity of our Saviour) a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men.' In this heavenly employment they are represented by the apostle John, Rev. v. 11, 12. 'who beheld, and heard the voice of many angels round about the throne—saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.' This pleasant work they perform with the greatest unanimity and ardour, as is plainly intimated in the expression under consideration; where the short hymn mentioned by Isaiah, is said to have been sung by the seraphims, divided into two choirs, who alternately performed their parts, the one singing responsively to the other,

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The holiness of God consists in the supreme excellence, and perfect rectitude of his divine nature; in consequence of which, he is infinitely removed from all manner of

* Psal. cxlviii. 1, 2.

impurity, and always acts consistently with his glorious attributes. With respect to himself, all his counsels, dispensations, and commands, admirably correspond to his consummate excellencies: in his whole character, and in all his actions, there is not the smallest spot, or the least impropriety. He cannot do evil through ignorance, because his knowledge is perfect; nor through weakness, for his power is almighty; nor through malice, because his rectitude is complete; neither can he deceive, commit injustice, or do that which is cruel, because he approves, and loves what is true, upright, and righteous. With regard to his creatures, the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright; he requireth what is holy, just, and good; and discovers the greatest aversion to all sin, and the highest detestation of it. ‘He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity*.’ This holiness of God is strongly expressed in every precept of his perfect law, which was at first engraven upon the heart of man; which, with awful solemnity, he published to Israel from Mount Sinai; and is briefly comprehended in these words, ‘Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy †.’ It is frequently manifested in the dispensations of his providence, whereby he condemns all unrighteousness and sin, and punishes the guilty with terrible judgments; among which, none are more to be dreaded, than that spiritual blindness and hardness of heart, mentioned in the 9th and 10th verses of this chapter. In a special manner is the divine purity illustriously displayed, in the way whereby guilty sinners are restored to the enjoyment of the favour of God, and eternal salvation, through the mediation of his own Son; whom he set forth to be the propitiation for sin, that he might be just and holy, as well as merciful, in justifying and saving them that believe in Jesus. In this manner the Lord God demonstrates

* Hab. i. 13.

† Lev. xix. 2.

the infinite holiness of his nature: he makes known to men what he loves, and what he hates; what he allows, and what he disapproves; what is well-pleasing to him, and what is offensive. In few words, the holiness of Jehovah is manifest in heaven, in earth, and hell; in the exercise of his justice, in the distribution of his grace, and the communication of his glory; in the dispensations of his providence, in the precepts of his law, and the doctrines of his gospel, which contain the brightest manifestation of divine purity and righteousness that the world ever beheld.

This holiness is thrice ascribed, by the seraphims, to the Lord of hosts. This repetition may intimate, that the purity of Jehovah is infinite and ineffable, and of everlasting perpetuity; that he is holy in his nature, in his word, and in his works; that in himself he is perfectly holy; that all holiness is derived from him; and that he ought to be served in the beauties of holiness. It may also express the high admiration in which the holiness here celebrated, was held by the adoring seraphims; and the ardour of their affection, when employed in this sublime exercise. Or rather, this rehearsal, as some have supposed, may allude to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one Jehovah, whose supreme excellence, and consummate rectitude, are here asserted by celestial worshippers. This last remark accords with the voice of the Lord, which saith in the 8th verse, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us,’ where no more than one divine person is introduced making this inquiry.—Be ye imitators of God, then, as dear children. Diligently study a growing conformity to the holiness of his nature, and the purity of his law and gospel. Be ye merciful, just, faithful, patient, and perfect as your Father in heaven, that as the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen in things which are made, so the other invisible things of God, even his everlasting holiness and purity, may be seen in your good conduct, and holy behaviour,

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on account of which others may be induced to glorify him in your behalf.

The whole earth is full of his glory. The Hebrew words may be rendered, *the fulness of the earth is his glory*; and in their literal, and most obvious sense, are certainly true. Ever since the earth was formed, it hath been full of the glory of its great Creator; whose wisdom, power, and goodness, are therein nobly displayed; with whose mercy and loving-kindness it is richly replenished; and whose praises, therefore, ought to be continually celebrated. In this hymn of praise, however, the seraphims seem to refer to some peculiar manifestation of the divine glory afforded to the kingdom of the Son of God, of which Isaiah was now favoured with a prophetic vision. When God gave his law, which was glorious, from Mount Sinai, it was delivered only to one favourite people, the posterity of Israel. ‘He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel*.’ The glory of the Lord thereby displayed, was confined within the narrow limits of the land of Canaan. The Most High reserved the more grand and extensive manifestation of his glory, to beautify and enrich the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ, after he had rejected the Jews on account of their rejecting him. To the pardon which he granted the Israelites, at the entreaty of his servant Moses, he subjoined this solemn declaration; ‘As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord †.’ In the words before us, the celestial worshippers announce the fulfilment of this divine prediction; and on that account celebrate the praises of Jehovah, anticipating, in their adorations, this certain and most joyful event. By the whole earth, then, may be meant all the nations and kingdoms of this world, the inhabitants of all the various tracts of this earth, and the several quarters into which it is divided, wherein the kingdom of the

* Psal. cxlvii. 19.

† Numb. xiv. 21.

Son of God is erected. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is full of the glory of Jehovah, in which it shines with the most refulgent splendour, confounding the implacable enemies of mens salvation, baffling their stratagems, and counteracting their efforts for our destruction:—conducting them by the most unlikely means to the end he hath in view; leading them through weakness and reproach, temptation and affliction, through innumerable difficulties, and death itself, to life, glory, honour, and eternal felicity:—rendering perfectly consistent, necessity and contingency, the freedom of second causes, and the infallible certainty of divine purposes:—effectuating the greatest events by the feeblest instruments, that all the glory may redound to himself:—making the same dispensations produce the most opposite effects, and by a thousand other ways I stay not to mention.—In this manner, the earth was filled with the glory of the Lord: all the divine perfections were manifested and exalted after the exaltation of Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the gospel which was published over the whole known world, confirmed by the most stupendous miracles, accompanied with the plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit, and every where attended with the most glorious effects. In another view, this truth was also remarkably verified, when the land of Israel was smitten with a curse, and the miserable remnant of that devoted people were scattered through the world; and the glory of the Lord, manifested in the righteous judgments inflicted upon them, was made known to all nations. And hereafter it shall be more eminently accomplished, when all the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ.—Let us, my brethren, unite our praises with those of celestial spirits, unto that God who hath filled the earth with his glory, and often make the theme of their adorations the subject of our prayers; heartily joining with seraphs and saints, in the last supplication of the man according to God's

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own heart, ' Let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen *.' To these let us add our utmost efforts, in bringing to pass what we devoutly wish his almighty hand may speedily execute.

4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

In this verse, the prophet describes the powerful effects which followed the voice which he heard, and the glory which he beheld.—The whole scenery of this vision is taken from the temple. God is represented as seated on his throne above the ark, in the most holy place, surrounded by his ministers, employed in celebrating his praises. The veil separating the most holy place from the outer part of the temple, is supposed to be removed; and the prophet, to whom the whole is exhibited, seems to have been placed beside the altar of burnt-offering, at the entrance of the temple, which was filled with the divine glory. From this station, he saw the whole vision which he relates; and, on this occasion, he particularly observed the posts of the door moving at the voice of him that cried. The voice of the seraphims at this time was so loud and melodious, and the power of their heavenly music was so great, when extolling the holiness and glory of Jehovah, that the posts, with the lintel of the door of the temple, seemed to tremble, to be shaken in the place where they stood, or loosed from their place. This was a very surprising effect; for these posts were so large and strong, that they supported gates of brass, which are said to have required twenty men to shut them, on account of their prodigious weight. This part of the vision might prefigure the removal of these pillars, and the destruction of the temple by the Romans, which was the beauty of the

* Psa. lxxii. 10.

Jewish church, the place of their divine worship, and consequently the abolition of the whole Old-Testament œconomy. Josephus records the following circumstance, which, he says, happened at the destruction of the temple: Cæsar, seeing that he could not restrain the fury of the soldiers, and that the fire which had been thrown into the temple increased, entered with his nobles, the flame not having yet pierced into the inner part of the temple, and entreated the soldiers to extinguish the fire. Notwithstanding, a certain soldier fired the posts of the doors; and presently the flame appearing within, Cæsar, and the captains, departed*. Viewing the temple which our prophet beheld in vision, as a type of the church of Jesus Christ, in which God manifests his glory, the moving of the posts, may signify the powerful effects which were to be produced by the gracious presence of God accompanying his worship, particularly the celebration of his praises. To this purpose two remarkable instances occur in the New Testament: ‘After the apostles had
 ‘prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the
 ‘Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with
 ‘boldness †: When Paul and Silas prayed, and sang
 ‘praises unto God, suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were
 ‘shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened,
 ‘and every one’s bonds were loosed ‡.’——Jehovah now resides in the Christian church as he did in the temple of old; therefore let the people tremble: he sitteth between the cherubims; let the earth be moved.

And the house was filled with smoke. Smoke is sometimes mentioned in scripture as an emblem of the wrath of almighty God, and the terrible judgments with which it is attended. In this sense it must be understood in the song which David spake to the Lord, in the day the Lord delivered him from the

* Joseph. book vii. chap. x. † Acts iv. 31. ‡ Acts xvi. 25, 26.

hands of all his enemies: ‘ There went up a smoke
 ‘ out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth de-
 ‘ voured *.’ As smoke hurts the eyes, and darkens
 the air, so the anger of Jehovah, and the awful cala-
 mities which proceed from it, often blinds the eyes of
 mens minds, and spreads around them the darkness
 of error and prejudice, as is exemplified in the follow-
 ing part of this chapter. If we suppose, with some
 commentators, that the smoke of which Isaiah speaks,
 was significant of the just displeasure of God, and its
 direful effects, then it prefiged, with the other cir-
 cumstance mentioned, the destruction of the Jewish
 temple, which was accomplished by fire, that always
 occasions smoke. By that awful judgment, the most
 high God revealed his wrath from heaven against a
 stubborn and rebellious people, who were seized with
 astonishment and terror, when they saw their temple
 on fire, whilst they remained in a state of spiritual
 blindness and stupidity.—Smoke is also sometimes
 mentioned as a symbol of the glorious presence and
 divine majesty of God: ‘ Mount Sinai was altogether
 ‘ on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in
 ‘ fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke
 ‘ of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly †.’
 The apostle John affirms, ‘ That the temple which he
 ‘ beheld was filled with smoke from the glory of God,
 ‘ and from his power; and no man was able to enter
 ‘ into the temple ‡.’ As fire is used figuratively, to
 denote the perfect purity, the constant activity, and
 inextinguishable glory of the Lord, who appeared to Moses
 in a flame of fire §, and spake out of the midst of fire
 to the Israelites ¶; so a cloud or smoke, which is the
 effect and evidence of fire, is spoken of as an emblem
 of the divine presence ¶. If, with other expositors,
 we think, that the smoke which the prophet beheld in
 vision, was an emblem not of wrath, but of the gra-

* Psal. xviii. 8.

† Exod. xix. 18.

‡ Rev. xv. 8.

§ Exod. iii. 2.

¶ Deut. iv. 33.

¶¶ 1 Kings. viii. 10

cious presence of God, then it prefigured the high privilege which the church of Jesus Christ, under the New Testament, was to enjoy, of being filled with the glory of the Lord. This renders ordinances of divine institution desirable and pleasant, and makes them effectual for accomplishing the most salutary purposes: it affords direction and protection, strength and consolation, and every blessing necessary to felicitate the servants of God. It is therefore the object of their most ardent desires; it is highly prized as their peculiar prerogative, and gratefully acknowledged as the source of all their felicity and joy. In the enjoyment of this very desirable blessing, they adopt the words of the patriarch Jacob at Bethel, ‘ This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven * : they join with David, saying, ‘ One day in thy courts is better than a thousand †; and with the disciples on the mount, where their Master was transfigured, ‘ It is good for us to be here ‡.’—Let us then diligently seek to enjoy the gracious presence of God, which, according to this last interpretation of the words, was represented by the house being filled with smoke. To this important duty, we are encouraged by the happy success which hath attended the supplications of the saints for this distinguishing favour. When king Solomon had ended his prayer, the glory of the Lord filled the house: after the apostles had prayed, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. You are not to expect such visible external symbols of the divine presence as were granted to these extraordinary persons, though you may hope to enjoy such as are as satisfying, as comforting, and as useful.

5 ¶ Then said I, Wo is me, for I am undone, because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

* Gen. xxviii. 17. † Psal. lxxiv. 10. ‡ Matth. xvii. 4.

I am now to treat of the second part of this vision, which contains the solemn designation of Isaiah to the performance of a very important part of his prophetic office, to which God had appointed him.—The first thing which occurs, and is here strongly expressed, is the consternation and dread which the prophet felt, arising from a consciousness of his unworthiness and impurity, which he humbly acknowledges. Very great must have been the perturbation of his mind when he uttered these words, *Who is me*; which express vehement grief and fear, sorrow for his unsuitness to join the seraphims in adoring the most holy and glorious Lord, and fear arising from the manifestations of divine majesty and glory which he contemplated.—*I am undone*; I am cut off; I am nothing, and of no account. I am so astonished, that I cannot speak; my strength is gone, my tongue falters, my lips quiver, and my heart faints. A discovery of the majesty, purity, and glory of God, never fails to excite in those who enjoy it, a deep sense of their unworthiness and pollution, and to fill their minds with dread and astonishment. Of this many instances are recorded in scripture. When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, it is written, ‘Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God*.’ When upright Job acknowledged unto God, ‘Now mine eye seeth thee,’ he immediately adds, ‘Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes †.’ At the time Daniel, a man greatly beloved, was favoured with a glorious vision, ‘he was greatly astonished, his sorrows were turned upon him, and he retained no strength, neither was any breath left in him ‡.’ When Jesus Christ manifested his glory, by working a miracle, ‘Simon Peter fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord ||:’ and the apostle John, behold-

* Exod. iii. 6. † Job xlii. 5, 6. ‡ Daniel x. 8. 16, 17.
 || Luke v. 8.

ing Jesus Christ in his glory, 'fell at his feet as dead *.' As the deformity of any object seems always greatest, when brought into comparison with perfect beauty, so the sinfulness and impurity of men must ever appear in the strongest light, when they enjoy clear views of the holiness of God, and his intimate presence with them. A proper sense of this discovery disposes to exclaim, *Woe is me, I am undone.* The temper of mind emphatically expressed in this abrupt sentence, is highly becoming the most eminent saints on earth, when contemplating the glory of the Lord. If exalted spirits around the throne of God, as represented in this vision, are deeply penetrated with an affecting sense of the divine glory, what deep humiliation, and self-abasement, is suitable to guilty creatures, who have rendered themselves the just objects of divine displeasure; and who ought to consider every favour from God, not as a display of goodness to the worthy, or of bounty to the indigent, but of mercy to the guilty, who have undone themselves! The majesty and the mercy of God ought deeply to penetrate our hearts, whilst we contemplate the manifestations of his glory.—The prophet subjoins three reasons why he thus exclaimed.

Because I am a man of unclean lips. This acknowledgment requires to be explained with great caution. We are not to imagine, that Isaiah charged himself with any habitual impurity in his conversation, which would have been perfectly inconsistent with his character as a holy man of God, who spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, and was highly honoured with singular marks of divine favour. The lips, being the chief instrument of speech, are here mentioned, I suppose, to denote speech itself, which the prophet confesses to have been impure, when contrasted with the holy adorations of the seraphims. He hesitates not to own, that, though sanctified in part, and

* Rev. i. 17.

devoted without reserve to the service of God, there was still to be found in him much remaining impurity, which discovered itself by his lips. He humbly acknowledgeth, that he was not a perfect man, that never offended in word, or spake unadvisedly with his mouth. The first views of the enlightened mind are commonly fixed upon the enormities of the life; whereas, after these are in some measure subdued, new discoveries of the glory of God bring to light the secret corruptions of the heart, which pollute the conversation, and produce such affecting complaints as that now before us. The prophet, admitted to contemplate the glory of Jehovah, fully sensible of his comparative impurity, laments the sins of his lips, which proceeded from the remaining corruptions of his heart; with which he was deeply impressed, as unfitting him for joining the heavenly hosts in their praises, and performing aright the important services to which he was called.—If this great prophet, this eminently good man, was thus distressed with his impurity, what heart-affecting views ought we to have of our pollution before God, arising from our opposition to his holy nature, and perfect law, notwithstanding the external displays afforded us of his infinite glory, his consummate rectitude, and unparalleled grace! The more we reflect upon our conduct, and compare it with the standards of complete excellence, we shall see the greater reason to abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.

And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. The men of Judah doubtless justly merited the character which Isaiah here gives them. Recollect what you have already heard respecting their character, from the foregoing chapters of this prophecy, and you will readily acknowledge the justice of what is here affirmed. They were a people of impure hearts, whose hands were defiled with blood, and with bribes; whose princes were companions of thieves, and lovers of gifts, and oppressors of the fatherless and the widow.

dow. Avarice and ambition, pride and injustice, luxury and intemperance, with a perverse contempt of the great and everlasting distinction between good and evil, were some of the prevailing iniquities which rendered them highly worthy of this description. They were become altogether corrupt, and their doings were against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. There were indeed among them, even at this time, a remnant according to the election of grace, whom God reserved to himself, and consecrated to his service: these, however, were but few, when compared with the bulk of the nation, who were not cleansed from their filthiness. The acknowledgment of his living among wicked people, the prophet unites with the confession of his own impurity, as contributing in part to unfit him for the sacred services of God, who is holy. The servants of the Most High always consider themselves intimately connected with those among whom they dwell; of which David, Ezra, Daniel, and many others, are instructive examples. The prosperity of the nation to which they belong, engrosses a considerable share in their prayers and praises: in its adversity, they are deeply affected, and greatly depressed. At the increase of the godly, they heartily rejoice: when iniquity abounds, and the wicked are exalted, their sorrows and confessions are multiplied; they humbly acknowledge before God, the prevalence of sin, and the pollution they may have thereby contracted, which discourages them from engaging in holy and difficult services.—From this confession, let us learn two useful lessons, which you would do well to derive from it. Let us be excited to the exercise of public spirit, and a generous concern for the welfare of the society to which we belong. Sensible that we are easily tainted with impurity, let us cautiously avoid the contagion of bad company, which often hath a more powerful influence upon us than we are willing to acknowledge.

For

For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. The object which the prophet contemplated was very great, being no less than a symbolical representation of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, a great King above all gods, who, according to the apostle John, was no other than Jesus Christ. In viewing his glorious majesty, and supreme excellence, he is struck with inexpressible astonishment. Bright manifestations of divine glory were too much for a feeble mortal to sustain: rays of inaccessible light were by far too strong for human eyes to behold. No wonder, therefore, that Isaiah is dazzled, confounded; and deeply humbled. Multitudes of thoughts might, on this occasion, crowd into his mind, all tending to produce these effects; among which we may suppose the following: The inadequate sentiments he had entertained of that divine glory, which seraphs adored; the disproportionate apprehensions he had formed of that holiness he now heard highly celebrated; the unequal opinion he had framed of that power, which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Indeed the saints of the Most High have always been deeply affected, when admitted to behold the symbols of the divine presence and glory; of which the prophet Habakkuk presents to view a very memorable instance, in some respects similar to the one before us. Toward the beginning of the third chapter of his prophecy, he thus speaks; ‘O Lord, ‘I have heard thy voice, and was afraid:’ and at the 16th verse, he represents the powerful effects which that divine revelation produced; ‘When I heard, ‘my belly trembled: my lips quivered at thy voice: ‘rotteness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of ‘trouble.’—Though we, my brethren, neither enjoy, nor have any reason to expect such manifestations of divine glory as were afforded to Isaiah, and the other prophets, such rich displays of the glory of God are notwithstanding exhibited to our view, in the works

works of creation, providence, and redemption, as ought to excite our highest admiration, and humble us to the dust. In every creature we may behold the glory of the Lord, which appears conspicuous in the sun, the moon, and the stars; in the corns, the trees, and the plants. We may behold it in every dispensation of providence; in the rise, progress, and declension of empires, kingdoms, and states; in the various revolutions through which they pass; as well as in the formation of our bodies, and preservation of our lives. Especially we may contemplate it shining with ineffable splendour in the face of Jesus Christ, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, the great author and finisher of salvation. Did we view these discoveries of God as we ought, we should thereby cultivate the happy temper here expressed; and find good reason to adopt, in our measure, the confession of the prophet, Our eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.

In this and the following verse, the prophet narrates a distinguishing favour which he seasonably received on this occasion, by means of one of the seraphims. After what he had seen, he was deeply depressed with an affecting sense of his own impurity, and the impurity of the people among whom he dwelt: in this condition, he greatly needed fresh intimation of pardon and sanctification, which are now afforded him in a remarkable manner. For this purpose, one of the celestial ministers, who attended the throne of God, is immediately dispatched to perform this kind office; who, having received the divine command, flew, with the utmost speed, to execute his orders. Though the benefit here mentioned, proceeded entirely from God, it was communicated through the ministry of

one of the seraphims, who took with him a live coal he had taken with the tongs from off the altar.—Fire, you know, was kept alive continually upon the altar of burnt-offering in the temple, near to which the prophet seems to have had his station, when he contemplated this vision. God expressly required, that ‘the fire should ever be burning upon the altar: ‘it shall never go out*.’ Upon this altar the priest was commanded to offer the trespass-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the sacrifices that were to make atonement before the Lord, that sin might be forgiven. From this altar the prophet saw the seraph fly to him with a live coal.—Before I proceed to explain the transaction, recorded in this and the first part of the following verse, it may not be improper to observe, that the passage must be understood in its figurative and emblematical sense. The symbols presented to the view of our prophet were significant and instructive, when interpreted on symbolic principles, or according to the same ideas of analogy we explain the prophetic style, which abounds with hieroglyphic imagery. And you ought to reflect, that there is really nothing more strange in applying this mode of interpretation to visions, than to parables, or to any other species of prophecy. You ought also to consider, that when the eternal God condescends to reveal himself to his servants, he does it in the way he sees proper, and in a manner suitable to their ideas and apprehensions; and if men mistake, the fault is in themselves, not in the use of common emblems.—Besides, it is proper that I remark, that in the part of the vision now before us, as in some other prophecies, there is a mixture of the plain and highly figured style, which it is necessary carefully to discriminate. The action of the seraph is symbolical: the words which he uses are to be understood in their literal sense.

The altar in the temple, from which the seraph took the live coal, was a type or figure of Jesus Christ;

* Lev. vi. 13.

whom the apostle, writing to the Hebrews, affirms to be the altar of Christians, of which they have right to eat. In the fourth and fifth chapter of that epistle, the inspired writer demonstrated, that Jesus Christ was our great High-priest. In the ninth and tenth chapters, he exhibits him as our great atoning sacrifice; and in the passage now referred to *, he speaks of him as our altar. The sum of what is there said upon this subject seems to be this: The solemn sacrifice which was offered for sin on the great day of atonement, was burnt not upon the altar in the temple, but without the city of Jerusalem. In like manner, Jesus Christ offered himself a sacrifice for us without the gate; and whosoever will participate in the merit of his atonement, must repair not to the altar in the temple, but to that altar whereupon he made expiation for sin. As the sacrifices presented by the Israelites, were expressly required to be brought to the altar of the Lord their God, that they might be offered thereon, in order to their being accepted, so the spiritual sacrifices of Christians must be presented upon the altar of Jesus Christ, where alone atonement is made for sinners, and from thence they must ascend, would we have them become acceptable unto God. Jesus Christ then is the altar which sanctifies our gifts, and renders our sacrifices well-pleasing unto God; which was typified by the altar of burnt-offering, from which the seraph took the live coal.

The difficulties which occur in the Old and New Testament are very different. The obscurity which we observe in some passages of the New Testament, arises chiefly from the language, in which there is intermixed Hebrew idioms, Talmudical phrases, and allusions to Jewish opinions and customs, which, when properly understood, the meaning appears plain and obvious. In the Old Testament it is otherwise; the difficulties we there meet with, arise not so much from

* Heb. xiii. 10.

the expression, as from uncertainty respecting the sense in which it ought to be understood. So far as the subsequent revelation of the will of God explains it, we proceed with certainty and safety; but when that ceases to enlighten our path, we hesitate, and can pronounce nothing decisively. This observation will, I hope, in some measure apologize for my offering you a conjectural interpretation of what was signified by the live coal, which the seraph applied to our prophet's mouth, as I do not know any passage in the New Testament that authorizes any determinate meaning to this symbol. The cloven tongues, like as of fire, which, on Pentecost, sat upon each of the apostles, hath but a distant resemblance to what the prophet had represented to him in vision. A burning coal is a proper emblem of light, heat, and purity, which important blessings are conveyed by the Holy Spirit to the servants of God. These were benefits which Isaiah, in his own humble apprehension, greatly needed at present; and therefore the seraph, by this symbolical action, represented and communicated them to him. I do not suppose there was any inherent virtue in the coal lifted from off the altar to take away iniquity, and to purify from sin, no more than there was in the waters of Jordan to cure Naaman of his leprosy, or in the imposition of the apostles hands to confer the Holy Spirit. God, however, in his infinite wisdom, hath oft-times fixed a certain connection between external symbols, and the communication of important spiritual benefits; of which the vision we are considering affords a remarkable instance. Other instances are frequently presented to our view, in the sacred institutions of baptism and the Lord's supper.—Let us gratefully acknowledge the divine goodness, in appointing external visible objects and actions to be significant of spiritual invisible blessings; and let us earnestly pray, that, in divine ordinances, the former may prove the means of conveying to us the latter, which they are appointed to exhibit.

7 And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

In this verse, we are informed what the heavenly messenger did with the live coal, and what was the comfortable message he delivered to the prophet.—With the coal he touched Isaiah's mouth. This was a very significant action performed toward one who had just complained, that he was undone, because a man of unclean lips. That his lips might be purified from their pollution, his faculty of speech improved, and he himself qualified for delivering with freedom and boldness the affecting message with which he was to be intrusted, the Spirit of God was to consecrate and sanctify him; and of this he hath a visible representation afforded him. The seraph having laid the coal upon his mouth, said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; thus intimating, that this was a representative action which ought to be carefully attended to, and would be accompanied with very happy effects. Consider this live coal is not common, but holy fire, brought from the altar of God. This is a sign and seal of pardoning mercy, and sanctifying grace, communicated to thee by the Holy Spirit, through the mediation of the great Messiah.—How admirable the condescension of the most high God, who employs significant signs, the more deeply to impress spiritual objects upon our minds; and to signs he is graciously pleased to subjoin words, the more clearly to explain their meaning and design!

And thine iniquity is taken away. The Hebrew word here translated *iniquity*, properly signifies *crookedness* or *perverseness*; and hence it is used to denote iniquity, which proceeds from a froward disposition of mind, and consists in deviating from the straight rule of the law of God. Such perversity in temper and conduct justly exposes men to the divine displeasure, and renders them guilty and polluted before God;

God; and consequently occasions deep self-abasement in his servants, when they are admitted to contemplate his glory. What a desirable intimation then did our prophet receive from the seraph, who told him, Thine iniquity is taken away; the transgressions thou hast committed are blotted out of remembrance; the guilt thou hast contracted is removed; the punishment thou hast deserved is cancelled! The expression here used, seems to refer to an ordinance in Israel, with which Isaiah was perfectly acquainted; the appointment of which you read, Leviticus xvi. 7. and following verses. Over the head of the goat, there called the scape-goat, the high-priest was ordered to confess all the iniquities of the children of Israel, putting them upon the head of the goat, which was to carry them away into a wilderness, where he was to be sent by the hand of a proper person. This divine institution, into the meaning of which you ought carefully to examine, seems to have been typical of Jesus Christ taking away the sins of his people, confessed over his atoning sacrifice. Indeed this is a work altogether peculiar to him, who, you know, was manifested for this very purpose, to take away sin; and gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity. In this manner the prophet's iniquity was taken away; and of this inestimable favour he received the comfortable assurance, which would greatly increase the pleasure and joy which would arise in his mind from the possession of this distinguishing mercy.—Hearing of this glorious privilege, say unto God, in the words of Job, ‘Do not condemn me:’ say unto him, with the publican, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner:’ say unto him, in the language which he himself hath taught, ‘Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously:’ and may he who hears the supplications of the needy, grant your petition; and, along with it, the agreeable intimation, Thy sin is taken away.

And thy sin purged. The original word rendered *sin*, is derived from one that signifies *to err*, or *miss*
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the mark at which we ought to aim: hence it is used to express sin, whereby men wander from the path of God's commandments, come short of the glory of God, and miss the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. To assist us in forming just sentiments of this abominable thing, it is compared in scripture to those things which are reckoned most disagreeable and loathsome, such as poison and disease, dross and scum. Like a dangerous contagion, it hath extended its baneful influence through every part of our constitution: it hath defaced the beautiful image of God with which we were originally adorned, and defiled all the faculties of the human soul; in so much that even the best of men acknowledge, that in their flesh dwelleth no good thing; that their lips, and their hearts, are unclean. How joyful then must have been the tidings here announced to the prophet, 'Thy sin is purged!' What an inspired apostle affirms, concerning pardon of sin, we may with equal justice assert, with respect to purification from sin: he saith, Without shedding of blood there is no remission; to this we may add, Without shedding of blood there is no sanctification. It is the office of Jesus Christ, the great High-priest of our profession, who purifies unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works, to cleanse and sanctify his church. This blessed work he performs through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and the sprinkling of his blood, which cleanseth from all sin; and, upon this occasion, it was eminently advanced in Isaiah, as the celestial intelligence declared. Thus God purged our prophet's sin, removed acknowledged pollution of heart and lips, and consecrated him to the difficult services which he was about to assign him.—Though this is God's own proper work, and the effect of his distinguishing favour, he invites us to co-operate with him: he requires us to do more than we are able, that we may seek ability from him, who can do more for us than we can ask or think, and who works all our works in
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and for us. Sensible that though the mercy flows from him, the duty is ours, let us cast away all our transgressions, and cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here *am* I, send me.

We are now to consider the third part of this vision, in which the prophet, after his consecration, received command from God to deliver a very afflictive message to the Jewish nation.—By what he had already seen and heard, his mind, formerly troubled, is composed and invigorated; and now that he is prepared for eminent and difficult services, he is not allowed to indulge in ease and indolence, but is to be immediately employed in executing the commission he is going to receive from God. He had already heard the voice of the seraphim, praising the holiness and glory of Jehovah, and delivering a most agreeable message to him from heaven. Now he hears the voice of the Lord of hosts, whom he beheld enthroned in divine majesty, speaking to him so as to make trial of his affection and obedience. In scripture, a voice is sometimes ascribed to God; and he is said to speak, when he gives intimation of his will, in whatever way he maketh known his mind, which he always does in a manner suited to his own grandeur, and the capacity of the creature. What peculiar marks of majesty and power attended the voice of the Almighty at this time, by which our prophet discerned it from that of the seraphs, I stay not to inquire, being certain that he was fully convinced by satisfying demonstrations, that the words which he heard proceeded from the Lord of hosts.—The inquiry which attracted his attention was this;

Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? These words do not suppose doubtful deliberation, or fluctuating uncertainty, as to the person who was to be employed in the service after mentioned; but have a manifest allusion to the custom of kings and princes, who consult as to the most proper person to be intrusted with a commission of high importance. They plainly intimate, that the work to be performed was extremely difficult, and required great fidelity and fortitude in him who was to be employed in the execution of it; that very few were equal to the service; and that God would not commit it to any one, who was not willing and ready to undertake it from ardent affection to his highest Lord. Besides, they afforded Isaiah an opportunity of declaring his immediate readiness to perform any service which God would be pleased to assign him.—In the latter of these inquiries, there is a remarkable change of person, from the singular to the plural number, which ought not to escape our notice; as it seems to intimate, that, in the perfect simplicity and unity of the Godhead, there is, in some respect, a plurality, which, in this manner, is often hinted in scripture, and in many passages is clearly evinced. This is a very sublime subject, upon which it becomes us at all times to speak with the greatest modesty, impressed with a deep sense of our inability to comprehend in what manner the infinite Jehovah exists. Let us attend with diligence, humility, and meekness, and the greatest deference, to every information that is given of this very important subject; forming all our sentiments, and founding all our determinations, entirely upon the revelation which God hath given of himself in his word. In consulting these lively oracles, I observe an expression somewhat similar to this in Genesis i. 26. where God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ I cannot suppose that Jehovah there addressed himself to angels, who had no hand in creating man; but that he expressed himself thus,

to point out what the wise man requires us to remember, namely, our Creators * ; the Hebrew word there, as well as here, being in the plural. I read in Genesis xi. 7. that the Lord God said, ‘ Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language.’ In English, one person, especially a great personage, sometimes uses the plural number, to give dignity and consequence to what he saith ; but it is otherwise in the Hebrew tongue, where the plural number is not used, that I know, to denote honour and dignity, but to signify more than one. Other instances of this mode of expression might have been added ; but enough hath been suggested to gain your candid attention to a circumstance well deserving your notice, who search the scriptures with earnest desire to learn the knowledge of the Most High.

Then said I, here am I, send me. Blessed reply to the voice of the Lord. The words clearly express the prophet’s willingness to obey the divine command, whatever it might be ; and to execute the work assigned him, however arduous it might prove. He does not ask, Where he was to be sent, to whom he was to go, or what message he was to carry ? but, like a faithful servant, or dutiful son, he waits to receive the commands of his great Lord, and heavenly Father ; and immediately, without limitation or delay, he offers his services. Warmed by heavenly fire, and inflamed with ardent zeal for the divine glory, he quickly replies to the voice of God, Here am I, ready to execute thy orders ; send me to perform any piece of service thou pleasest ; assign me my station, point out my business, and I shall endeavour to discharge it with alacrity and fidelity, reposing unsuspecting confidence in the assistance of thy grace. Our prophet stands in distinguished eminence above all his fellow-servants, in respect of promptitude in engaging in the work of God. Moses and Jeremiah, deeply affected

* Eccles. xii. 1.

with their unworthiness and insufficiency, discovered, at first, some reluctance in undertaking the difficult services to which God appointed them; whereas Isaiah, after his iniquity was taken away, like the angels who excel in strength, and do his commandments, hearkened to the voice of the Lord, and stood in readiness to fulfil his pleasure.—What a noble example is here presented to view, of the cheerful submission of a Christian, whose heart and mouth ought always to echo obedience to the calls and commands of God! When thou, O Lord, didst say, Seek ye my face; my heart replied, Thy face, Lord, will I seek above all things. When thou callest, I will answer; when thou stretchest out thy hand, I will regard; when thou commandest, I will obey. When thou saidst, Whom shall I send? Then said I, Here am I, send me. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth. Such ought to be the language of each of our hearts, and such the obedience of every one of us through every period of life.

9 ¶ And he said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

Isaiah's offer of services is accepted, and he receives his commission and authority from the Lord of hosts, who acquaints him with the message which he orders him to go and deliver to the Jews.—I am going to remark what some of you may perhaps have observed, that the apostle Paul, when at Rome, expounding the kingdom of God to these who came to his lodging, concluded his discourses by quoting this scripture, with a remarkable variation*: 'Well spake the Holy Ghost, by Esaias the prophet, unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say,' &c. As the glory of Jehovah, which our prophet saw, was the glory of

* Acts xxviii. 25, 26, 27.

Jesus Christ, according to the apostle John; so the voice of the Lord, which he heard, was the voice of the Holy Ghost, according to the apostle Paul.—The commission given to Isaiah is in these words, *Go tell this people.* Every word here merits our attention. Go from this place, in which thou hast been favoured with a vision of my glory, of the sublime exercises and cheerful obedience of my ministers; in which also thou hast received such marks of my favour, and communications of my grace, as may furnish thee for the important services upon which I now send thee to this people among whom thou dwellest. Remark, God does not call them, as on many other occasions, his people, but this people; thus disowning his relation to them, and testifying his just displeasure against them, on account of their wicked abuse of the high privileges which for long time they had enjoyed. In a similar manner he had formerly spoken of them to his servant Moses, after they had fallen into idolatry: ‘Go,’ said he, ‘get thee down: for thy people which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves*.’ Here our prophet is ordered faithfully to inform his countrymen, by word or writing, of the message with which he is intrusted; to conceal no part of it, however severe it might seem to him; but to deliver the whole with courage and firmness, as became the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

Hear ye indeed, but understand not. What is contained in this and the following verse, is five times cited by the writers of the New Testament, beside being once referred to in the Epistle to the Romans. The people to whom the prophet was sent with this message, had been intrusted for many ages with the oracles of God. To them were made known his statutes and his judgments, his ordinances and his laws. With the greatest magnificence and solemnity, he published his law from Mount Sinai in the ears of

* Exod. xxxii. 7.

their fathers, who were commanded diligently to teach what they heard to their children, and their childrens children. They had also enjoyed for a long period the ministry of the prophets, whom God raised up among them in continued succession, from Moses to John the Baptist, who were employed in communicating, explaining, and inculcating the will of God; and with such assiduity, that they rose up early, and sat up late. As this prophetic vision looked forward to times which were then future, to these important advantages I must add, the glorious ministry of the Son of God, who came to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and acted as a minister of the circumcision, for the truth of God to the fathers. Justly did Moses, contemplating the privileges they had already enjoyed, and those which they had in prospect, address them in this animated manner: ‘ Ask now of the
‘ days that are past, which were before thee, since the
‘ day that God created man upon the earth, and ask
‘ from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether
‘ there hath been any such thing as this great thing is,
‘ or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the
‘ voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire,
‘ as thou hast heard, and live *? To the most important subjects their attention was frequently demanded, and urged by the most interesting considerations, which the prophets never failed to suggest.

Notwithstanding these signal advantages, Israel was a people of no understanding. They enjoyed the best means of instruction, but they reaped little or no real benefit from them: they neither understood the import, nor considered the design of what they heard. To hear with understanding is indispensably necessary, in order to mens profiting by what they hear; for unless divine truths are in some measure understood, they can neither be believed nor practised as they ought. Spiritual understanding of the will of God

* Deut. iv. 32, 33.

is absolutely requisite to walking worthy of him unto all well-pleasing, and to shew, that, in affection and practice, objects occupy their proper place and order. The vast importance of people's understanding what they hear, our blessed Saviour frequently inculcated upon those who attended his ministry. He often introduced his subject, by calling upon them to hear and understand: after discoursing to them, he sometimes asked, If they understood what they heard? he blamed them if they did not understand, and commended those who were so happy as know the things which were freely given them of God. The bulk of the Jewish nation corresponded to the description here given of them: they were destitute of spiritual understanding in the law of God, which they misinterpreted, and made void through their traditions: they had little or no acquaintance with the reality and excellence of heavenly objects.—Alarmed by the awful judgments to which this people exposed themselves, by not understanding what they heard, do you, my brethren, study to be attentive, intelligent hearers of divine truths, and well acquainted with the word of God, and the several parts of which it is composed. For this purpose, never interpret scripture in a sense contrary to the dictates of sound reason, inconsistent with the plain drift of the passage, compared with other texts, or the connection in which it stands. Explain words and phrases not always in the meaning they bear in common conversation, but that in which they are used in other places of scripture: understand them literally, when they will bear this sense; and figuratively, when you find it necessary. Make such abatements from general expressions, such exceptions to them, and allowances for the whole manner of speaking, as you perceive the nature of the subject, and the custom of the sacred writers demand. Think not you have done with a passage of scripture as soon as you understand it; your principal work is yet before you, to feel its divine influence, and display

its divine efficacy, to have an experimental sense and feeling of the interesting subjects of which it treats *. With the greatest earnestness supplicate the Father of lights, to illuminate your understanding in the knowledge of his truth; adopting the words of the royal psalmist, Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Then may you hope to read and hear with understanding.

And see ye indeed, but perceive not. The great objects which were presented to the view of this people, to which the prophet here refers, were, the astonishing wonders which were wrought before their eyes, the many terrible judgments inflicted upon their enemies, the signal victories with which they were crowned, the glorious deliverances and remarkable interpositions of kind providence in their behalf. Of these things Moses often reminded them; and especially before his death, when he called unto all Israel, and said unto them, ‘Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs and those great miracles †.’ In after periods, new wonders were from time to time exhibited to their view; surprising conquests, through the favour of heaven, they obtained; many narrow escapes did they make from destruction, and unexpected ways were opened for their return from captivity. And in the latter days, after the great Messiah made his appearance among them, they were eye-witnesses of his stupendous miracles of grace for the salvation of men, and the establishment of his kingdom upon earth: they beheld illustrious displays of omnipotence and compassion, conspicuous proofs of the divine presence and glory, and the great light of the glorious gospel which then sprung up. They saw and

* See Secker, vol. vi. serm. v.

† Deut. xxix. 2, 3.

heard those things which many prophets and righteous men desired in vain to see and hear, as our Lord informed them *.'

Though they beheld the wonderful works of God, the bulk of them had no spiritual perception of their excellence and glory, no just sense of their worth and importance; nor did they perceive the rich manifestations of the power and glory of Jehovah, which were therein presented to their view, so as to honour and obey him. The correct taste of which highly cultivated minds are possessed, enables them to form just sentiments of natural beauty, to discern sublimity of thought, elegance of style, propriety and gracefulness of good conduct. In like manner, the spiritual perception, with the want of which this people are here charged, gives a spiritual taste for moral beauty, a high relish for that which is truly excellent, and a just discernment of the beauty and design of the works and word of God. Destitute of this principle, the great part of the Jewish nation did not observe the hand of God in the remarkable dispensations of his providence, though eminently conspicuous in every step by which he conducted them; they did not perceive the dignity and glory of the Messiah; they were blind to all the wonderful proofs which he gave of his divine mission, of his amiable condescension, and consummate ability, to perform the whole work of a complete Saviour. The consequences were, that they remained in great measure ignorant of the admirable displays of the divine attributes which they beheld; they were destitute of sanctifying knowledge, of the devout exercises of the heart, and sacred consolations, to all of which spiritual perception is certainly requisite.—Endeavour to acquire this spiritual perception, under the teaching of God, in the faithful improvement of the advantages you enjoy. The illumination of the understanding, which is absolutely

* Matth. xiii. 17.

necessary for this purpose, proceeds from the Father of glory; and therefore to him you must earnestly apply for it. And that nothing may be wanting upon your part, diligently study your Bible, which is the appointed mean of spiritual improvement, the perfect standard of spiritual perception, and the great repository of divine knowledge, from whence you may bring forth to view the wonderful things which this people saw, and yet did not perceive. I am the more anxious about your diligence in this matter, that I see before me, in the following verse, a very alarming event foretold, as the effect of not understanding and perceiving the providences and truths of God.—

This prediction began to be fulfilled in the days of Isaiah, and the following prophets; and was afterward more fully accomplished, under the ministry of Jesus Christ and his apostles. The Jews heard the discourses which these illustrious persons delivered, but did not understand aright their meaning and design. They saw with their bodily eyes the many miracles which these servants of Jehovah performed, but they perceived not the proofs which they afforded of their divine mission, nor the truth and importance of their doctrine.

10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

The prophet is ordered to foretel the terrible spiritual judgments which God was about to inflict upon the people to whom he was sent.—The heart here mentioned, is not to be understood in its literal, but in its metaphorical sense; denoting the whole soul, with all its various faculties, which being disordered and vitiated by corrupt principles and bad habits, are unfit for performing their proper functions.

To this last circumstance I would have you advert; for the heart of this people must have been greatly depraved, otherwise we cannot suppose that God would have sent the prophet to make it fat or gross. This expression must likewise be interpreted in its figurative sense; signifying stupidity, sottishness, and incapacity of understanding the true import and design of what was seen and heard. To produce this deplorable state of mind, nothing contributes more than sensuality, and the immoderate use of present enjoyments in time of external prosperity. If sensibility, according to the opinion of some, is principally seated in the bowels, we may, without much difficulty, ascertain the import of the words, *Make the heart of this people fat.* Let them become insensible, and unaffected, both with the mercies and judgments of God.—*And make their ears heavy.* By the ears, seem here to be meant the powers of the mind, by which attention is given to the nature, importance, and design of divine truths. In hearing aright, so as to profit by instruction, the mind, as well as the ear, must be employed. Careful attention, spiritual understanding, suitable affection, and the exercise of various graces, such as faith and meekness, are all necessary. The ears, in this sense, were to be made heavy, dull, and inactive; in consequence of which, they were not to attend diligently to the things that were spoken to them by the Lord; they were not to consider their high importance, or interest in them; nor to treasure them up in their hearts, so as to derive spiritual benefit from them.—*And shut their eyes.* The eyes of the understanding, I suppose, are here intended, by which spiritual objects are contemplated, and necessary acquaintance with them is acquired. These eyes were directed to be shut, or closed; in consequence whereof, this people did not know aright the things freely given them of God, nor did they form just sentiments concerning them: they saw the stupendous miracles that were wrought among them;

but

but the Lord did not give them a heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear, to this day*.

After what you have heard, are you surpris'd that the Lord of hosts should have delivered this commision to the prophet? Why, my brethren, the people to whom he was sent, had forfeited their hearts, their ears, and their eyes. They were foolishly puffed up by the form of knowledge they retained; they were unthankful for the light they enjoyed; they grossly abused the instructions they received, and obstinately persisted in the sins for which they were reprov'd; and therefore, you must acknowledge, that it was just in God to hide their heart from understanding. As the purification of the heart, and the opening the ears and the eyes, are attributed to God in scripture, as his distinguishing favours; so covering the heart with fat, making the ears heavy, and shutting the eyes, are also ascribed to him, as acts of his righteous dominion, and judicial procedure, respecting those who have done what they could to bring themselves into this condition, by rejecting the counsel of God, and obstinately persisting in their evil ways. This appears to me abundantly evident, from many passages both in the Old and New Testament: among these are the following, which you may consult at your leisure; Exod. iv. 21. Deut. ii. 30. John xii. 40. Rom. i. 28.—This is indeed a very nice point, and requires to be touch'd with great tenderness, lest, by saying too much, we obscure the divine glory; or say too little, and leave the subject involved in difficulty, and expos'd to abuse. Certain it is, that God doth not communicate any wrong propensity to the minds of men: that he neither commands, persuades, or approves of any thing that contributes to render the human heart gross or insensible, that shuts the ears and eyes of men, and prevents them from understanding his word, or contemplating his works. Some things,

* Deut. xxix. 4.

however, concur toward this event, which the scriptures does not conceal; such as, the removal of those restraints whereby people were kept from sin; according to what God saith of Israel, 'I gave them up to their own hearts lust; and they walked in their own counsels *:' the permission given to Satan, who is the chief agent in this business, to pervert the mind by carnal prejudices and affections; for proof of which, you may compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. with 1 Chron. xxi. 1.—If you really think that I have assigned too much to the divine agency in this matter, you are at full liberty to subtract whatever in conscience you apprehend, in this representation, is too strong, and to form your judgment upon scripture-evidence.

Do you ask, as it is natural you should, How could Isaiah, a man of like passions with us, make fat the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes? You ought to know, that, in the style of scripture, the prophets are said to perform those things which, in obedience to the command of God, they foretel shall certainly come to pass. In this sense, they are said to plant and to pluck up, to build and pull down, to save and destroy, to shut up heaven and to finite the earth, to make fat the heart, and many great things, of which you read in prophecy. Two instances may suffice at present to illustrate and confirm this remark, which contains the answer to the above inquiry. God informs the prophet Jeremiah, Chap. i. 10. 'See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.' One would think this commission was more suited to a Cæsar, or an Alexander, or some great commander, attended with vast armies, than to a humble prophet, whom his countrymen conspired to destroy. This unarmed man was sent to

* Psal. lxxxix. 12.

root out kingdoms, and destroy nations, by denouncing against them desolating judgments, and complicated calamities, which their enormous wickedness, and multiplied transgressions, justly merited. The prophet Ezekiel, Chap. xliii. 3. speaks in the same style, where he says, ‘ The appearance of the vision which he saw, resembled the vision that he had seen, when he came to destroy the city ;’ that is, as it is rendered in the margin of some Bibles, when he came to prophesy that the city should be destroyed. In like manner we explain our prophet’s commission. He did not make the heart of this people fat ; he did not stop their ears, or close their eyes ; but only foretold that these judgments should befall them, because they had for long time shut their eyes, their ears, and their hearts, against instruction.

Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. ‘ Everlasting righteousness, O Lord, is in all thy commandments. True, O Lord, and righteous are thy judgments *. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor ? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again ? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever †.’ I pause, I hesitate what to say. The words before us plainly intimate a very momentous truth ; namely, that the long-suffering patience of God, exercised toward sinners, hath its bounds, beyond which it will not extend ; that the door of divine mercy shall be shut against those who obstinately persist in abusing the riches of divine goodness, and in turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness. ‘ And we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth,

* Rev. xvi. 7.

† Rom. xi. 33.—36.

‘ against

‘ against them who commit such things *.’ Persons of this description, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath; and have no prospect of being converted to God, and healed of their spiritual distempers.—Let us remember, that the examples, as well as doctrines and predictions, recorded in the Old Testament, are intended to convey instruction to us under the New Testament. Impressed by this interesting consideration, diligently improve the word and providences of God, for your conversion, and the cure of your inward disorders. Return from all your transgressions, that iniquity may not prove your ruin: with your whole hearts return unto the Lord, from whom you have deeply revolted. Earnestly supplicate, that he may heal all the wounds you have received by sin; that he may forgive you all trespasses, and restore your souls to spiritual health, soundness, and beauty. No disease ever reproached his skill, or resisted his power; and as for his tender compassion, and readiness to relieve, they never fail. Wait upon him then, who waits to be gracious, who delights in shewing mercy, and you shall certainly experience his kind assistance, and seasonable relief.

11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.

In answer to his request, the prophet is here informed by the Most High, of the continuance and consequences of the awful spiritual judgments he was commanded to denounce against the Jews.—You will observe, that Isaiah does not presume to utter a word in way of murmur and complaint, with respect to the afflictive dispensations of divine providence, which were the subject of the message he received

* Rom. ii. 2

from God. He reverences and adores that sovereignty, which always manifests an inviolable regard to the sacred rights of justice and equity, and yet never fails to shew tender compassion to those who expose themselves to the judgments of heaven. An instructive lesson this, of that amiable humility, and profound submission to the will of God, which we ought, on all occasions, to express. In his humble address to Jehovah, he expresseth his firm belief, that he whom he acknowledgeth as Lord, hath an unquestionable right to dispose of all persons and events as seemeth good in his sight. The import of his prayer seems to be this: Since thou, the great Lord of all, hath ordered me to foretel these terrible calamities, I presume not to say, What dost thou? or to doubt of the rectitude of thy dispensations; but as thou hast not yet declared how long thy displeasure shall endure, and what shall be its consequences, permit me humbly to ask, How long, and how far its effects shall extend? I ask this question, not to gratify vain curiosity; but, moved with pity at the approaching wretched condition of this people, I am solicitous to know how long they will be allowed to continue in this miserable state. To this modest petition the prophet received the following answer, from him who allows none of the posterity of Jacob to seek his face in vain, and who always fulfils the just desire of them that fear him:

Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant. The Lord plainly declares, that the judgments he had employed Isaiah to foretel, were to be prolonged until the final rejection, and the general dispersion, of this people to whom he was sent; until the overthrow of their state, and the desolation of their land. These calamities are described in several particulars, which are so arranged as to form a sort of climax, wherein the representation rises step by step, until it reaches the highest degree of desolation. The spiritual judgments already mentioned, were to be attended with

very

very great temporal miseries. Their cities were to be wasted without inhabitant. Of these, as well as of towns and villages, there were vast numbers in Judea. The Levites alone, you recollect, had forty-eight cities allotted to them, though they were to have no inheritance among their brethren. The cities, in general, seem to have been populous and flourishing, well fortified, and furnished at least with one synagogue. All their cities, however numerous their inhabitants, however magnificent their buildings, however elegant their houses, and strong their fortifications, were to be entirely destroyed, and left without inhabitant.—*And the houses without man.* Cities have sometimes been overthrown, and yet some of their inhabitants have been left to possess a few remaining houses which have escaped the general ruin. But so complete was to be the destruction of the cities of Judah, at the time referred to, that there was scarcely a single person to be left in them. Those who did not desert their habitations through fear, were to be killed, or carried away captive by the enemy; and so strictly were the few remaining houses to be searched, that no person almost could avoid the general calamity. Sometimes when cities have been depopulated, and houses demolished, in distant country places, and in remote corners of the land, a few people have escaped the general calamity; but in the event referred to, it was to be otherwise.—*And the land be utterly desolate.* That land which was the glory of all lands; a land which God cared for, and watched over continually; a pleasant, a holy, and fruitful land, which flowed with milk and honey, which abounded with fountains and brooks of waters; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, fig-trees, and pomegranates, of oil and wine; a land whose stones were iron, and in whose hills was brass; where nothing was wanting to render life comfortable: even that land was to be utterly desolate; or, as the Hebrew words denote, and are rendered in the margin of some Bibles, it was to become

become desolate with desolation. The vineyards were to be spoiled, the gardens were to be laid waste, and the fields were to remain uncultivated, so as to afford just reason for adopting the mournful complaint, 'Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burnt up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste *.'

12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and *there be* a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

In this verse, the answer given by the Lord to our prophet's request is continued.—A land may be laid desolate, and its inhabitants led captive by their enemies into neighbouring countries, from which they may soon return to their native soil. To prevent expectations of this sort, this people, who were to be dispersed and led captive, were to be removed far away into remote regions and distant kingdoms, from which they could not entertain the least prospect of returning home. And that none might imagine that this calamity was to be mitigated, by its short continuance, it is added—*And there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land*; or, a desolation of long continuance, which was to be lengthened out, until the most populous places of the land about Jerusalem were almost totally deserted. You will observe, that the removal of men far away, and their dispersion, is here attributed to the Lord, who sends desolation, and every other judgment upon wicked men, whoever be the instruments that he employs. The Assyrian, and afterward the Roman armies, marched into Judea: but they were only the staff in his hand, wherewith he beat the men of Judah; and the axe, where-

* Isaiah lxiv. 10, 11.

with he hewed them. We are apt to look no farther than second causes, and to attribute our perplexity and distress wholly to them; and therefore we are taught here, and in many other passages of scripture, that they are under the direction of God, who woundeth and killeth, who sendeth war, famine, and pestilence among men, as the just punishment of their transgressions.—Thus we see that spiritual judgments, and temporal calamities, were the appointed portion of this people, in consequence of their obstinate continuance in sin. By the spiritual judgments with which they were visited, their hearts became insensible to the evils which befell them, and to those which were threatened to be inflicted upon them. They neither were afraid of their approach, nor endeavoured to prevent them. By the temporal calamities with which they were afflicted, they were severely punished for their folly: they were instructed in the necessity of true repentance, and the danger of transgression; and are set up as beacons, to warn other people of those sins which proved their ruin. Behold therefore the goodness, and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. Be not then high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee*.—Though the temporal miseries mentioned in this and the foregoing verse, befell the Jews in great measure about the time of the Babylonish captivity, they experienced them in a far higher degree at the memorable period in which their cities and land were laid desolate by the Romans, when these predictions received their completion.

13 ¶ But yet in it *shall be* a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil-tree, and as an oak whose substance *is* in them, when

* Rom xi. 20, 21, 22.

they cast *their leaves*: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

In the first part of this verse, a remarkable circumstance is mentioned, respecting the desolation where-with the land of Judea was to be visited.—The passage is somewhat obscure, and differently explained by interpreters. The meaning, as I apprehend, is simply this: Notwithstanding the general dispersion and destruction of the Jews at the time to which this prophecy refers, about a tenth part of them should still remain, who were to return to their own land, and as far as possible to their former condition. These, however, were to be eaten; that is, as the word sometimes denotes *, they were to be devoured and swallowed up by their enemies, to whom they became a prey. This sense of the expression corresponds well to the two great events to which it is supposed to refer, and by which it was verified. When Nebuchadnezzar carried away great part of this people into captivity, there was yet a tenth remaining in the land, the poorer sort, who were left to be vine-dressers and husbandmen under Gedaliah †. The dispersed Jews gathered themselves together to the governor from all quarters, and so returned, as here foretold; but after the death of Gedaliah, they miserably perished. When the prediction was afterward more eminently accomplished, in the dissolution of the Jewish commonwealth, and the utter desolation of the land, by the destruction of about eleven hundred thousand Jews, a small residue of them was still left. This remnant having soon greatly multiplied, near half as many of them were not long after slain under the emperor Adrian. Yet after these and other dreadful exterminations, by which they might be said to have been eaten and devoured, we see, with astonishment, that the stock still remains, from which God,

* See Eccles. v. 12. and Micah iii. 3. † See 2 Kings xxv. 12. 22.

according to his promise, will cause his people to shoot forth again, and to flourish.—Another good meaning may be given to the words under consideration, if the return spoken of is understood of return to God. The prediction will then foretel the conversion of some few of the Jews, the escaped of Israel, and them that were left in Zion, who, by means of the gospel, were to be turned from lying vanities, to the faith and obedience of the Messiah, in the joyful hope of participating in the inestimable blessings of his great salvation. These converts, however, were to be eaten and consumed by their ferocious persecutors; which was, in fact, the case, as we learn from the history of the Acts of the Apostles.

As a teil-tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves. By a well-known similitude, the subsequent condition of the Jews is here represented. With the teil-tree, I suppose, you are unacquainted; and you are likely to continue so, for there is hardly any thing less certain than the Hebrew names given in scripture to several kinds of trees and plants. The oak, you know, whose substance is in it, though its leaves fall off in the end of harvest, and it appears to wither and die, yea, though it be cut down to the ground by the hand of man, yet if the stock is left, from thence young sprouts will grow up, which, in process of time, will become trees. The Jewish nation was beautifully represented by a tree, and with great propriety compared to a stately spreading oak. Like a tree, it was firmly rooted and established in the earth, so that the united efforts of the most powerful kingdoms could not root them up. Like the sturdy oak, which raises its lofty head above other trees, and widely extends its branches, it was highly elevated above the empires and states with which it was surrounded: its power, influence, and reputation, reached far and near, and many took shelter under its shadow. This great tree was cut down, after it had shed its leaves: the stock and root being left

left in the ground, like an oak whose substance is in it, it shall again shoot forth, increase, and flourish. The almighty God will yet cause the root of Jesse to spring up, and bring forth many righteous branches.— Let us admire the kindness of God, who, in the midst of deserved wrath, remembers mercy; and who, with threatenings of deserved judgments, always mixes promises of divine consolation to his faithful people. The land of Judea was to be laid waste, and the cities depopulated; and consequently the ordinances of divine worship deserted: in this prospect, what shall support the dejected minds of God's upright servants? Shall they, in deep despondency, take up Balaam's parable, and say, 'Who shall live when God doth this*?' No: though all these direful events were certainly to happen, yet this people, though cut down, shall again grow like an oak, or a teil-tree. There is hope of this tree; though it be cut down, it will sprout again.

For the holy seed shall be the substance thereof. By the holy seed, may be meant the posterity of Abraham, who were also the children of God, 'a seed who serve him, who shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation †' These holy ones, whom God set apart for himself, and preserved from the general corruption, were the substance of the Jewish nation. They were to it what the sap is to the tree; they were as the salt, which preserved it from universal corruption; they were the light, which illuminated the world; the elect, on whose account calamities were mitigated, and evil days shortened. Such persons are a public mercy, and a general blessing. By their salutary counsels, their good examples, and earnest prayers, they never fail to prove a most substantial benefit to society, being often the happy instruments of averting judgments, and obtaining deliverances for the nation to which they belong. The strength and safety

* Numb. xxiv. 23.

† Psal. xxii. 30.

of kingdoms may frequently be ascribed, under God, not so much to the wisdom of statesmen, to the valour of soldiers, to fortifications upon land or navies at sea, to union at home or allies abroad, as to the more powerful influence of those who, in the words before us, are said to be the substance of the nation.—Or, by the holy seed, the great Messiah may be intended, who was the illustrious person promised to the patriarch Abraham, ‘in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed * ;’ and to David, ‘as the fruit of his body, whom God would set upon his throne †.’ Most justly does he merit the character of holy, on account of the spotless purity of his nature, the perfect innocence of his life, and the unblemished goodness of his actions. This root and offspring of David is the substance of the Jewish nation, to whom all their types and figures ultimately referred, from whom all the numerous branches of righteousness shall arise, through whom all the promises of grace given them shall receive their accomplishment, and by whom all the saints are preserved. This holy seed may continue long undiscerned among that people, like the sap of a tree in winter, which produces no visible effect; but when the time to favour them shall come, which shall be as life from the dead, they shall bud and blossom, and fill the face of the earth with fruit.

Thus far, my friends, through the help of God, I have advanced in my Lectures upon the Prophecies of Isaiah. How I have succeeded in this attempt, and what benefit you have derived from these exercises, you ought seriously to consider. So far as I am sensible, I have not amused you with empty speculations; I have not furnished you with subjects of controversy and debate, nor with weapons for censure and abuse. My sole aim hath been, to render you wiser, and holier, and better, that, through patience, and comfort of the scriptures, you might have hope.—Recollect

* Gen. xii. 3.

† Psal. cxxxii. 11.

how you have received and heard, of what sins you have been convinced and reprov'd, in what duties you have been instructed, against what dangers you have been warn'd, with what threatenings you have been alarmed, what consolations you have had administered, and what grateful acknowledgments you owe to the God of your mercies. Reflect what sense you have acquired of the holiness and glory of Jehovah, of your own sinfulness, and your need of the salvation of Jesus Christ, and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, Humbly entreat that the divine blessing may accompany what you have already heard, and that we may enjoy the divine assistance and presence in the whole of our progress through this sacred book. ' Now
' the God of peace who brought again from the dead
' our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
' through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make
' you perfect in every good work, to do his will,
' working in you that which is well-pleasing in his
' sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for
' ever and ever. Amen.'

PRELIMI-

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE are now going to consider the fifth and last part of the discourse contained in the first twelve chapters of this prophecy; which is composed of a variety of excellent matter, that is partly doctrinal, partly prophetic, and partly consolatory. It may be divided into five sections, in the following manner. The first is comprised in the seventh chapter: the second comprehends the eighth chapter, and the first seven verses of chapter ninth: the third extends from chapter ninth, verse 7th, to the 5th verse of the tenth chapter: the fourth includes the 5th, and following verses of chapter tenth, to the end; and the fifth is contained in the eleventh and twelfth chapters. The first of these sections, on which we are now entering, describes the future fortunes of the Jewish nation, as they stood connected with the kingdoms of Israel and Syria. Pekah, king of Israel, had entered into an unnatural confederacy with Rezin, king of Syria, against Judah. In the days of Jotham, and in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, they united their forces, and invaded that kingdom with a powerful army, threatening to dethrone and destroy the family of David. The king, and royal family of Judah, seized with consternation on hearing of their hostile designs, instead of supplicating protection and support from the God of their fathers, thought of calling in the king of Assyria to their assistance. In this critical emergency, the Lord of hosts was graciously pleased to send his servant Isaiah to comfort them in their perplexity and distress; with the assurance, that he would certainly accomplish his promises to David and his house, and frustrate the inimical intentions of the two kings who had conspired against them.

The chapter before us, begins with an historical account of the occasion which gave rise to this prophecy,

phesy, in ver. 1. and 2. Then follows a prediction of the ill success that should attend the expedition of Israel and Syria against Judah, which was to terminate in their destruction; of the certain accomplishment of which, God was to give them a sign, ver. 3.—16. From thence to the end of the chapter, the desolating calamities are foretold, which were to be inflicted upon the king and people of Judah by the Assyrians, whom they hired to their assistance.

C H A P. VII.

AND it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah king of Judah, *that* Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up towards Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it.

In these words, the event is mentioned which gave rise to the following prophecy.—The kingdom of Judah seems to have attained a higher degree of prosperity under the reign of Uzziah and Jotham, than at any other period after the revolt of the ten tribes. The former of these princes had recovered the port of Elath, on the Red sea, from the Edomites: he carried on wars against the Philistines, which were crowned with success: he compelled the Ammonites to pay him tribute: he repaired the fortifications of Jerusalem, and kept up a great and well-disciplined army. Equally attentive to the arts of peace, he encouraged agriculture, and the breeding of cattle; he employed husbandmen and vine-dressers. The latter, walking in the steps of his father, carried on the improvements that had been begun; fortified the frontier towns; conquered the Ammonites, who refused to be his tri-

butaries, and obliged them to acknowledge their subjection. In the following reign, after his son Ahaz ascended the throne, all these advantages were lost, and the kingdom of Judah was brought to the very brink of destruction, by means of the league that was formed between Israel and Syria. In an engagement with Pekah, he lost in battle one hundred and twenty thousand men; and the Israelites carried away as prisoners two hundred thousand women and children, which were afterward released at the remonstrance of the prophet Oded. Rezin improved the opportunity which the distress of Judah afforded him, of recovering Elath to Syria, of which they had been deprived by the Jews; and, uniting his forces to those of Pekah, they laid siege to Jerusalem. In this attempt, however, they failed of success; and all their most vigorous efforts were so baffled, that they could not prevail against it. This was a remarkable circumstance, worthy of attention.

After the time that David, king of Israel, expelled the Jebusites from this city, and beautified it, to be the seat of his empire, often did it fall into the hands of its enemies, on account of the wickedness of its inhabitants. When Rehoboam ascended the throne of his fathers, it was taken by Shishak, king of Egypt, who carried away the treasures of the temple and the royal palace. The reason assigned for this great calamity, as the Lord informed that prince and his people, was, ‘Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hands of Shishak*.’ Amaziah, king of Judah, having been defeated by the army of Israel, and taken prisoner, Joash entered Jerusalem, and carried away the treasures which were in the temple and the royal palace. This judgment was inflicted because the king of Judah deserted the house of God, ‘and bowed himself before the gods of the children of Seir, and burned incense unto

* 2 Chron. xii. 5.

‘them.’

‘ them *.’ Necho, king of Egypt, afterward entered Jerusalem, and took Jehoahaz, whom the people of Judah had set upon the throne, and carried him into Egypt, where he died. This affliction came upon him because he was regardless of the words of the prophet Jeremiah, which were spoken by the Lord †. About 600 years before Christ, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, entered the city; in six years after, he returned, and took Jehoiachin captive; and again, in little more than three months, he took the city, and carried away to Babylon the treasures of the temple and palace royal; because the king of Judah did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord ‡. And when the wrath of the Lord was kindled against his people until there was no remedy, Nebuchadnezzar entered the city Jerusalem, and destroyed it, carrying away the inhabitants into a seventy years captivity. Thus was Jerusalem attacked at different times by its powerful enemies, whose success against it is uniformly attributed to the sins of the princes and people of Judah. And though, in the reign of Ahaz, idolatry was established by the command of the king throughout Judea, and the service of the temple intermitted, yet, through the tender mercy and forbearance of God, their enemies, who went up to war against Jerusalem, could not prevail against it.—Let us humbly adore the patience of God, who does not speedily execute sentence against mens evil works; who waits to be gracious, and therefore ought to be exalted.

2 And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.

* 2 Chron. xxxv. 14. † 1 Esdras i. 28. ‡ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9.

The occasion which gave rise to the following prophecy is here farther explained.—The alarming news had reached the court of Ahaz of the above-mentioned alliance, and the hostile designs of the confederate nations against the throne and kingdom of Judah. Their intention in going to war against Jerusalem seems to have been, to dethrone Ahaz; and, in his room, to set up king over Judah, a son of Tabeal, one of the family of Tabrimmon. The Hebrew word used to express the connection formed between the king of Israel and the king of Syria, intimates, that the one kingdom rested upon the other; and that they firmly relied upon each other's assistance, which they had mutually agreed to furnish. Though this was, without doubt, a very strong confederacy, it was a very unnatural league. Pekah, king of Israel, though professedly a worshipper of the true God, and nearly connected with Judah, in order to subjugate that kingdom, formed an alliance with Rezin, king of Syria, their inveterate enemy, an idolatrous Heathen prince, who reigned in Damascus. The house of David had often yielded to the superior force of these kingdoms, when separately attacked by them; and now that they had united their strength, and intended to fall upon the Jews, and to assault their metropolis, they had just reason to fear their joint efforts would be crowned with success. Their timidity, at this time, might be greatly increased, by the recollection of the terrible judgments to which they had exposed themselves by their enormous transgressions. In these dangerous circumstances, the court of Ahaz, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, were greatly alarmed, and filled with consternation and dread.—Would you then, my brethren, not be afraid of evil tidings, let your hearts be fixed, trusting in the Lord: in this exercise, you may expect to enjoy the most agreeable serenity of mind, amidst the ill reports you may hear, and the troubles with which you may be visited.

And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. Both prince and people, having heard of the intended invasion of their country, were seized with dismaying fears of the approaching enemy; in consequence of which, a universal commotion was visible through all the land of Judah. ‘The righteous shall never be moved: he is not afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord* :’ whereas wicked men are terrified at imaginary dangers, and the report of threatening calamities. The apprehensions of impending desolation seem to have struck the king and people of Judah with a panic, and to have filled them with perplexity and timidity. The effects were, they became credulous of the worst reports that were circulated, suspicious that matters were worse than represented; their own weakness increased; the power of those from whom they apprehended danger was magnified; the faculties of their minds were enfeebled, and rendered unfit for devising means of safety; and their vigour was so enervated, that they became incapable of executing schemes that might have been formed for their relief. This general perturbation of mind, arising from the above report, is here illustrated by a beautiful similitude. On account of its powerful operation and universal influence, it is compared to the strong effects which the wind produces upon the trees of the forest, when it blows with violence. Persons of all ranks and conditions were bended by its mighty influence, and were moved by its force, which proved superior to all opposition. This tremour and consternation was felt not only by those who were naturally of a weak and timid disposition, but by those also who were more stout and courageous.—Deeply sensible of the distress and danger arising from the state of mind here described, let us get our hearts established with grace, and diligently

* Psal. cxii. 7.

beware of those sinful practices which give occasion to dismay and terror in the seasons of alarm. Particularly, let us guard against security and presumption, which have often proved fatal to multitudes. Unexpected dangers easily surprize and distress; whereas when known, and looked for, they may either be prevented in their approach, or we may be provided for them against the time of their appearance. Proper expectation, and suitable preparation, will either weaken them, or strengthen us; render them less capable of hurting us, or us more able to sustain them: whereas every calamity that finds us indulging in sin and security, will thereby acquire considerable advantage over us.

3 Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the high-way of the fullers field.

At this critical time, in which the king of Judah and his people were agitated with perplexing fears, and overwhelmed with dread of the rumoured advance of the formidable confederate army of Israel and Syria, the Lord orders our prophet to go forth with his son, and meet the king at the place here mentioned.— In what manner Jehovah delivered this command to his servant, it is unnecessary curiously to inquire: it was so given as not to leave him the least room for hesitation or uncertainty who spake to him, or what he said on this occasion. Ahaz was one of the most wicked princes that ever sat upon the throne of Judah. He was an idolatrous king, who, in the several cities of his dominion, made high places, to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers. In the time of his distress, instead of acknowledging his transgressions, and returning to the Lord, he trespassed more and more against him. His daring impiety, and obstinate perseverance

in sin, is thus emphatically described by the writer of the Second Book of Chronicles: ‘ Ahaz * ;’ or, as the words in the Hebrew denote, *He was always Abaz*. Many other princes have, like him, wrought wickedness, but afterward have repented of their crimes, and desisted from their evil ways; but this king signalized himself by his continuance in sin, and his inflexibility in the practice of the most enormous transgressions. To this notorious sinner the most high God was graciously pleased to send a condescending message, by the prophet Isaiah, who was accompanied with his son Shear-jashub; whose name being interpreted, signifies, *a remnant shall return*. The name of this child was prophetic of a very remarkable event, which our prophet was now sent to announce to Ahaz and his people. This circumstance points at the propriety of the divine command, which required Isaiah to take with him his son, who was a pledge of the certain accomplishment of the promises which his father was about to deliver in the execution of his commission.—How nobly displayed are the grace and compassion of God, in sending the following message to such a wicked prince, and profligate people, whom he might justly have delivered to the will of their enemies! Let us earnestly seek to enjoy his favour, who is a present help in the time of need; and then may we hope to secure his merciful interposition in our behalf, in the season of perplexity and danger.

At the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the high-way of the fullers field. This was the place which God appointed for Isaiah’s interview with king Ahaz. Upon the top of mount Acra, on which stood part of the city Jerusalem, was the fountain of Siloam, anciently called Gihon. From this fountain there were two conduits, for conveying the water into two pools or reservoirs; one of which was called the Upper Pool, or the Pool of Solomon, for whose use and

* 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

pleasure it was probably formed; and the other was called the Lower Pool, the Pool of Siloam, or the Pool of Bethesda, remarkable for the sovereign virtue of its waters*. The former seems to have been designed for supplying the king's gardens with water, and the latter for the use of the citizens of Jerusalem. Near the conduit which served to convey the water into the upper pool, was situated the field where cloth was cleaned and whitened, called on that account the Fullers Field. To this place of great resort there was made a causeway or high-way, which passed not far from the end of the conduit. There the prophet was to meet Ahaz; who, at that time, might be viewing in what manner the water could be best conducted for the benefit of the inhabitants, and kept from being useful to the enemy in case of a siege.—In this circumstance, we have a striking proof of the foreknowledge of God, who hath the most accurate view of all his creatures, and all their actions, whether past, present, or future. The most contingent events are perfectly foreseen by him, to whom all his works are known from the beginning. Many instances of this occur in scripture. Nothing could be more accidental than the death of Ahab king of Israel, who was killed by an arrow shot at a venture in battle; and yet this circumstance was foretold, 1 Kings xxi. 19. And in the words before us, God informed Isaiah of the particular spot where he would meet the king, and have an opportunity of delivering to him the message with which he was intrusted. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain to it. Let us humbly adore, and love, and serve him, who possesseth it in full perfection, and employs it for the benefit of his people.

4 And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted, for the

* See Nehem. iii. 15. and John ix. 7.

two tails of these smoking fire-brands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.

In this and the following verses, to the end of the chapter, the prophet records the comfortable message he received from God to carry to Ahaz; in narrating which, he blends together the orders that were given him, and his execution of them, to prevent repetitions.—It begins with a necessary caution, which you will do well to consider as addressed to yourselves: *Take heed.* The Hebrew word signifies, to prevent or keep off any evil with which we are threatened. The direction ought to extend to all that we do; for not one duty can be rightly performed without diligent attention, and it is no less incumbent upon us than upon the king and people of Judah. It is a necessary and useful caution, which ought to be reduced to practice at all times, especially in seasons of perplexity and distress, such as that was wherein Ahaz and his subjects received this admonition. Take heed to your hearts, and keep them with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life: attend to the secret operations of your minds, and the objects on which your affections terminate, that you may perceive whether or not they are properly moderated and directed. Take heed to your tongue, that you sin not with your mouth: consider wisely what you say, to whom you speak, and to what purpose, especially when your minds are fretted, and when you feel yourselves under the influence of timidity and disappointment. Take heed to your senses, particularly to what you see and hear; for these are the avenues by which sin and vanity, or wisdom and instruction, enter into the heart. Take heed to your actions, what you do, and how you act, and for what purpose you are employed, that you may happily avoid the many sins and dangers to which you are exposed, and attain the great ends which you ought uniformly to pursue.—*And be*

quiet. The mind of Ahaz, and the minds of his people, were at this time greatly agitated, by the consideration of the perilous circumstances to which they found themselves reduced. They were all in commotion, like the trees of the wood when moved by the wind. This wicked prince who now filled the throne of Judah, must have been like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Such notorious finners as were now in Zion had many grounds of disquietude. In this state of perturbation and anxiety, they are directed to divest themselves of those distracting thoughts which arose from the dreaded approach of their enemies, to lay aside their distrustful sollicitude, and not vex themselves in vain. They were also required to possess a calm, composed, recollected state of mind; to trust in the Lord, and then they would be quiet from fear of evil.—Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, in the numbers, the discipline, and valour of their armies: do you, my friends, remember the name of the Lord your God; then may you find, as in former times, that when they are brought down and fallen, you shall rise and stand upright*.

Fear not, neither be faint-hearted. Fear is a natural passion, which arises in the mind of man on the view of threatened, expected calamities, and is inseparable from human nature in its present state. Though people are naturally in some measure afraid at the prospect of danger, and ought to use every lawful expedient to escape the evils that are dreaded, this passion becomes sinful and distressing, when it depresses the spirits, and leads to despair of deliverance. To this sinful extreme did the fear of the Israelites proceed, when they saw the Egyptians in their rear, and the Red sea in their front, as you read in the fourteenth chapter of Exodus. The king of Judah, and his subjects, felt at this time the influence of

* Psal. xx. 7, 8.

such excessive distracting fear, from which God, by the prophet, here dissuades them. He does not admonish them to become secure and insensible of danger, and to be wholly devoid of moderate fear on this alarming occasion, which might render them cautious and circumspect, and attentive to the means of preservation and safety; much less to lay aside the fear of the Lord, which is the truest wisdom. The good effects of a holy, well-regulated fear, are conspicuous in the conduct of Noah, who, being thereby moved, prepared an ark, to the saving of his house; and in the Israelites who feared the Lord, when, at the approach of divine judgments, they made their servants and cattle flee into the houses. It was certainly the duty of Ahaz, to take every proper precaution in order to avoid the danger he so much dreaded. The fear against which the king and people of Judah are here cautioned, is of that kind which is accompanied with torment, which proceeds from infidelity, overwhelms the mind with terror, and which so disturbs and distracts it as to disable from the right use of the means of deliverance, and the faithful performance of duty. This fear of man, this faint-heartedness, they are required to lay aside, as it might prove exceedingly hurtful to them in their present dangerous condition.—This salutary advice I address to you, my brethren, Fear not, neither be faint-hearted, in the prospect of the greatest dangers of which you may be apprehensive: your ‘Redeemer is mighty; the Lord of hosts is his name. The Lord preserveth the faithful. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord*.’

For the two tails of these smoking fire-brands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliab. To banish effectually from the minds of Ahaz and his people, those dismaying fears against which they were cautioned, the prophet subjoins a most con-

* Psa. xxxi. 23, 24.

temptible representation of the enemies whom they so much dreaded. The confederate princes of Syria and Israel are compared to two fire-brands, or pieces of burning wood, which for a little make a great blaze, and are quickly extinguished, so that both their heat and flame are soon over. Though when beheld at a distance, by persons who are frightened, especially in a dark night, they appear at first sight very formidable, yet in reality they have little hurtful or terrible in them. What! might the terrified prince say, not fear, when such powerful enemies are coming to invade the kingdom: they will consume all before them, like the flame of devouring fire. No, saith Isaiah: they resemble only the two tails of smoking fire-brands, whose flame soon dies, after which they smoke for a short time, and then are at an end. In them you have a significant representation of Rezin and Pekah. In the former year, their fierce anger had been kindled against Judah, and for some time raged with violence; now it was nearly extinguished, and little more remained than smoke. You may observe, that these princes are compared not to burning fire-brands, but to the tails of those which are smoking, and nearly consumed; which exhibits them in a very diminutive point of view, as incapable of doing much hurt, and therefore not the proper objects of terror. Their heat and strength were almost spent; their rage and fury were soon to abate; and therefore their hostile designs were not greatly to be dreaded.—How insignificant and contemptible are the objects of which we are sometimes afraid, if properly considered! they are no more to be feared than bits of burning wood, that are mostly consumed. To check this timidity, let us view things in the true light in which they are represented in scripture; and exercise constant dependence upon the kind providence and faithful promises of God, who disappoints the designs of the crafty, and works glorious deliverance for those who put their trust in him. Let us

not

not be greatly dejected, nor despair, in the most dangerous circumstances, of his gracious interposition, who hath delivered, and will deliver his people from all evil.

5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and, the son of Remaliah have taken evil counsel against thee, saying,

6 Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, *even* the son of Tabeal.

The prophet here informs the king of Judah, that he was perfectly acquainted with the causeless anger, the adverse counsels, and secret machinations of the confederate princes, notwithstanding he cautioned him against dismaying fears.—He well knew, that the Syrians and Ephraimites (with the king, who in way of contempt seems to be called the Son of Remaliah) were undertaking an expedition against Judah, with the mischievous design of overturning that kingdom, of dethroning Ahaz, and in his room elevating to the government the son of Tabeal. He had the best information, that the project which Rezin and Pekah had formed, to the execution of which they mutually encouraged each other, was, to march their forces, when united, into the land of Judah. Though they seem not to have had any just cause of quarrel with Ahaz, or any sufficient reason for carrying war into his dominions, yet, confident of their power to conquer Judea, and not hesitating with respect to their success, they resolved, to gratify their ambition and other turbulent passions, to invade that country, and distress its inhabitants. That they might the more successfully accomplish the hostile designs they had in view, they determined, if possible, to make a breach in the defence of the Jewish empire; or, as the original word may signify, Let us make a division therein for us, or, in other words, Divide the kingdom

kingdom between us. So certain did these adverse powers apprehend they were of victory in their intended expedition, that they had planned the division of the country before they entered it; and determined on the very person whom they were to invest with regal authority, who was to act as vice-roy. The son of Tabeal, who was nominated to this high office, not being mentioned in any other place of scripture that I recollect, I presume not to affirm any thing concerning him; but suppose that he was a branch of the royal family and house of Tabrimmon, the father of Benhadad, king of Syria.—Men may propose, but God disposeth of all persons and events. Plans are often formed for execution which the Most High frustrateth, and bringeth to nothing, as we see exemplified in the instance before us. When highly provoked by the pride, the presumption, the avarice, and other sins of a nation, he permits them to run into ruin. Destitute of public spirit, and wise counsel, they become feeble, entangled by difficulties from which they cannot extricate themselves; dangers are not foreseen, opportunities are neglected, and their plans of operation are disconcerted.

7 Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.

Ahaz, and the people of Judah, are here informed of the grounds upon which was founded the encouraging exhortation, ‘Fear not, neither be faint-hearted,’ notwithstanding the combined efforts of their numerous enemies.—*Thus saith the Lord God*, to whose power all things are subject, by whose wisdom they are directed, who does according to his pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of this earth, and who always exercises the most tender care of his peculiar people.—*It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass*: the evil counsel devised by the associated princes against Judah, to vex that nation,

tion, and to make a breach in its defence; to dethrone their king, and to set up another in his room. These events, which they were intent, if possible, to bring about, the Almighty here declares, they should not be able to effectuate by all their united exertions. Thus were they to be made to know, that the Most High ruleth among men, and giveth the kingdoms of the earth to whomsoever he pleaseth. This evil counsel, though the result of much ingenious contrivance and serious deliberation, was to be wholly overturned, and never carried into execution.—It is the glorious work of God to defeat the pernicious deliberations of wicked men, to prevent them from doing what they would do, and to bring to pass what they endeavour with all their might to oppose. How many visible demonstrations hath he given, in all ages, of this remarkable truth! Pharaoh, king of Egypt, framed evil counsel against the children of Israel; but it could not stand. Haman, the Agagite, devised evil against the Jews, intending no less than their destruction; in which he was totally disappointed, through a remarkable interposition of providence. Herod contrived a wicked plot in order to destroy the child Jesus; but he could not perform his enterprize. Rezin and Pekah took counsel against Judah; but it was frustrated. The Lord had them in derision; and none of these men of might found their hands able to execute the designs they had framed. In these and innumerable other instances, the Lord bringeth the counsel of the Heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect*.

8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people.

* Psa. xxxiii. 10.

9 And the head of Ephraim *is* Samaria, and the head of Samaria *is* Remaliahs son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

The most explicit assurance is here given, that the hostile designs of the confederate princes should be disappointed; that the danger which was so much dreaded should be averted; and that the deliverance of Judah was to be followed by the overthrow of Israel.—The Almighty would restrain both kingdoms that were united in league, within the bounds he had set them. The learned Bishop of London supposes, that the order of these verses hath been disturbed by a transposition, through mistake of some copiest. The order, he says, as it now stands, is preposterous, the destruction of Ephraim being first denounced, and then their grandeur is set forth; whereas naturally the description of their grandeur should precede that of their destruction. He observes, the arrangement of the whole sentence seems originally to have been thus: “ Though the head of Syria be Damascus, and the head
“ of Damascus Rezin, and the head of Ephraim be Sa-
“ maria, and the head of Samaria Remaliah’s son; yet
“ within threescore and five years Ephraim shall be
“ broken, that it be no more a people.” So be it. The conjecture seems worthy of being adopted. Damascus was the chief city of Syria, and Rezin reigned in Damascus over Syria. Samaria was the metropolis of Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah reigned in Samaria over Ephraim. In this state these two confederate nations were to remain: their territories were not to be enlarged by their union and expedition against Judah: notwithstanding all their efforts, it was to continue an independent kingdom. The daring project formed by these princes, of setting up the son of Ta-beal to be their vice-roy, was to be baffled; and Judah was to be governed by its own kings, until Shiloh, the promised Messiah, did appear. This was the unalterable decree of that God who worketh all in all,
and

who sets the boundaries of mens habitations, and who exactly fulfilled his purpose in its season.

And within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. Ephraim was originally the name which the patriarch Joseph gave to his second son * : afterwards it was transferred to one of the tribes of Israel. It was also the name of a mountain which belonged to the inheritance of the children of Joseph, and remarkable for being the burying-place of Joshua †. In following ages, there was a city called Ephraim, into which we are informed Jesus Christ entered, and there continued with his disciples ‡. Not only was this name given to the posterity of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, but this tribe being the most numerous and powerful of all the tribes of Israel, and the tribe to which their first king belonged, who governed them after their revolt from Judah, the name is often used to signify the whole ten tribes of Israel; and in this extensive sense it is doubtless to be understood in the prediction before us. Commentators have been much embarrassed in explaining the chronological difficulty which occurs here. If this prophecy was delivered about the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, as seems highly probable, it was exactly sixty-five years from the second year after he ascended the throne to the total depopulation of the kingdom of Israel by Ezzarhaddon, who planted the country with new inhabitants, and carried away the remains of the ten tribes which had been left by Tiglath-pileser and Shalmanezzer. Until that period the land of Israel was not wholly divested of its inhabitants, as appears from several passages of the history of Isaiah, in which Israelites are mentioned as still remaining in the country ||. Ephraim then ceased to be a people; the state was dissolved; the kingdom was destroyed. To prevent, however, the land from becoming entirely desolate, people were transported

* Gen. xli. 52.

† Judges ii. 9.

‡ John xi. 54.

|| 2 Chron. xxxiv. 6, 7. 33.

from Babylon, from Cutha, from Ava, from Hamath, and Sepharvaim, to dwell in the cities of Samaria. Thus were brought to ruin, from which they never recovered, the ten tribes of Israel, called Ephraim. Those of them who were carried away captive, a few excepted, who joined themselves to the Jews, soon adopted the idolatrous customs of the nations among which they dwelt; and, after some time, losing their name, their language, and religious rites, were totally absorbed by other kingdoms. Thus ended the kingdom of Israel, according to this prediction, sixty-five years after it was delivered by our prophet, which may be calculated in the following manner:

Ahaz reigned, after the time in which	Isaiah received		
this message from God,	- - -	14	} years.
Hezekiah reigned	- - -	29	
Manasseh, prior to the accomplishment			
of this prophecy,	- - -	22	

In all 65 years.

The exact fulfilment of this prediction, by the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, forms a very memorable and awful event, which proclaims the folly, wickedness, and ingratitude of that people; and announces, in the most solemn manner, the righteousness and vengeance of almighty God. It instructs the inhabitants of the world to learn righteousness: it demonstrates the perversity of mankind; and calls loudly to us to repent of our sins, and return to the Lord, whom we have greatly provoked to cast us off, and to deal with us as with Israel of old. Let us hearken to the admonition, and without delay obey the call.

If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. To believe, is to give credit to the testimony of those in whose knowledge and veracity we safely confide, firmly persuaded of the truth of what is related. In this sense the word is used in common language, in many passages of scripture, and particularly in the
words

words before us. Of this belief the prophet intimates, by this declaration, that he suspected Ahaz and his people were not possessed; of which their timidity, on hearing the report of the warlike expedition of the confederate kings, afforded strong evidence. They trusted for assistance, in the season of danger, to the king of Assyria; and not to that God who had often delivered their fathers when in the utmost perplexity and distress, and who had dissuaded them from unnecessary anxiety and dejection. Isaiah, therefore, observing the effects of their incredulity and distrust, concludes his message with this explicit assurance, If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. If ye will not give credit to the word of God, nor place your trust in his omnipotence and fidelity, but in an arm of flesh, neither your church nor state shall long continue in a firm and settled condition, but shall fall into ruin, and be abolished. This declaration places faith in the divine testimony in a most important light, meriting the most serious attention. A firm belief, and unsuspecting confidence in the word of God, is the only way by which the troubled, wavering minds of men can arrive at serenity and composure, and enjoy true support and stability. It operates by quiet submission to the will of the Lord, and patient waiting for the accomplishment of his promises, whilst it teaches to counterbalance present sufferings with future hopes. It excites to the exercise of humility; it cherishes godly sorrow for sin; it invigorates divine love; it leads to victory over this present evil world; and, in this manner, conveys real establishment and tranquillity to the heart. Unbelief pulls up the anchor which ought to preserve the mind firm and steady amidst the fluctuating uncertainties of this life, and the rising billows of affliction; in consequence of which, it is in continual danger of being agitated and distressed by every storm of adversity: whereas by believing the record of God, we account him able and faithful who hath promised; we

trust

trust that he will do as he hath said, and that he will certainly perform all the engagements he hath been pleased to come under for the benefit of his people.— Would you experience that desirable stability which arises from believing the testimony of God, endeavour to know the certainty of those things wherein you have been instructed, to understand what you ought to believe, and the sure foundation upon which your faith ought to rest, that it stand not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. I conclude this article with the good advice which pious king Jehoshaphat delivered to his army, when going forth to battle: ‘ Believe in the Lord your God, so shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper *.’

10 ¶ Moreover, the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying,

11 Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God, ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.

To remove every pretext for incredulity that might have been alledged, and to confirm the faith of Ahaz and that of his subjects, our prophet is employed by Jehovah, to require of the king of Judah to ask of him a sign.—In scripture-language, God is said to speak whatever he commands his servants to deliver in his name, or inspires them by his Spirit to communicate to others for their instruction. In this sense we understand 2 Chron. xxxiii. 10. where we are informed, that the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people, but they would not hearken; and in like manner we explain the words before us. The Lord spake now to Ahaz, as he did formerly, by the ministry of Isaiah, saying,

Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God. Signs are mentioned in various senses in scripture. Sometimes they

* 2 Chron. xx. 20.

denote things obvious to the senses, that either of themselves, of divine institution, or human appointment, serve to represent or remind men of somewhat different from themselves. In this view, the rainbow is called a sign or token of the covenant into which God entered with Noah *. The luminaries of heaven are called signs; because, by their appearance, motions, and revolutions, they not only announce the glory of God, but, by their situations, conjunctions, and eclipses, they indicate the seasons, the state of the weather, and other circumstances. At other times, they are used to signify wonders or miracles; sensible effects surpassing the power of natural causes to produce, or some extraordinary phenomena which cannot otherwise be explained than by attributing them to the omnipotence of Jehovah. In this sense, the royal psalmist acknowledges, that Israel remembered not the signs and the wonders wrought among them in the land of Ham †. Signs of this sort, are certain demonstrations of the power and presence of the Almighty; and have been performed, for the most part, to prove, that those who wrought them were sent of God to reveal his will to men, and that therefore what they delivered was incontestably true. Such were the signs and miracles wrought by Moses and the other prophets, and such was the sign that Ahaz was required to ask of the Lord his God. The Most High, who alone doth wonders, could easily have given the king, and his people, such a sign or miracle as would have effectually attested the truth of the message he authorized his servant to deliver, though it had not been asked. The prince, however, is desired to request this favour of the Lord, that, in this manner, he might publicly acknowledge his dependence upon the God of Israel, and express his agreeable expectation of his merciful protection.

* Gen. ix. 12, 13.

† Psal. cv. 27. and cvi. 21.

Though Ahaz is directed to ask for himself a sign, to remove his infidelity and distrust, and to excite hope and confidence in God, we must not suppose that his people were to be excluded from receiving benefit from it. The court and subjects of Judah were informed, with the prince, that unless they believed, they could not be established; and though this declaration could not be broken or reversed, there was great danger of their disbelieving the word of the Lord; and therefore a sign was offered, whose benefit might extend to the whole body of the people, to encourage their faith in the assurance they had received.—Though Ahaz was a man of a very wicked and profligate character, he is desired to ask a sign of the Lord his God. To justify this expression, we ought to recollect, that the king and his subjects were the posterity of Abraham, to whom Jehovah had promised, that he would be a God to him, and to his offspring; and that this prince was one of the family of David, to whom God had declared, ‘Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established before thee for ever*.’ In the full sense of the words, Jehovah was the God of Jesus Christ, who is called, by way of eminence, the seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth are blessed with some advantages, and through whom some of all nations enjoy spiritual blessings; in virtue of which, God is called their God. The words, when addressed to Ahaz, must be understood with some limitation. Though his grandfather and father, who were kings of Judah, seem to have been children of the promise, at this time he was an impious young man, addicted to the most enormous crimes. Descended, however, from great and good progenitors, elevated to the throne which they had filled, reigning over a kingdom composed of the professing people of God, who had not formally renounced their subjection to the Lord, the prophet re-

* 2 Sam. vii. 16.

minds Ahaz of his relation to the true God, who, by this message, displayed toward him the most admirable condescension.

Ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. No restriction is laid upon the prince, respecting either the place, or element, in which he might request the sign offered him to be performed. To give him the more convincing evidence of the prophet's being sent from God, that every plea for unbelief might be taken away, and that the king might have the fairest opportunity of displaying the dispositions he possessed, he is left entirely at liberty to pitch upon whatever sign he pleased, and to ask it to be done in whatever place he choosed. Ask it, said Isaiah, either in the depth, in the earth, or in the waters under the earth; or in the heavens above, in the firmament, or in the luminaries whereby the world is enlightened. Will you have the earth to be moved, the rocks to be rent, the waters to be dried up, the dead to be raised, or the face of the earth to assume an appearance different from the season of the year? Will you have some astonishing wonder done upon the beasts of the field, or the birds of the air? or, Shall the sun stand still in his course, or go backward; be eclipsed, or covered with darkness? Ask of him who calleth the things that are not as though they were, some of these signs; and, in confirmation of the message I have delivered to you from God, it shall immediately be done. The God whom I serve, and who sent me with the solemn assurance I have repeated, is infinitely able to do beyond what you can either ask or think. Refuse not to accept the generous offer now made you by him who speaketh to you from heaven: ask and you shall receive, that your faith may be strong.—How admirable the grace and condescension of the most high God, in vouchsafing to make this generous offer to a wicked, superstitious prince, to remove his incredulity respecting the message sent him by the prophet! How glorious the omnipotence

nipotence of Jehovah, for whom all things are possible; who is always able to perform what he declares, to confer what he promiseth, and to inflict what he threateneth! ‘Take heed, then, lest there be
 ‘in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing
 ‘from the living God*.’

12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.

These words contain the perverse answer which the king of Judah returned to the very condescending offer he received. It resembles the haughty reply of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to the just demand that Moses made upon him in the name of God, to let his people go, that they might serve him. Who is the Lord, said that proud monarch, that I should obey him? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go. The Almighty had graciously promised protection and safety, in the time of danger, to Ahaz and his people, from their numerous powerful enemies, who were about to march against them; and, as an evidence of the certainty of this extraordinary, unexpected event, God was pleased to offer a sign, for the conviction of the prince and his subjects, which he obstinately refused to accept. By this perverse conduct, he publicly avowed his impiety, and united rebellion to ingratitude.—How obstinate and perverse a creature is man! A crown, a sceptre, and a kingdom, cannot change his nature; nor do his obligations to God for his elevation to royal dignity, check the perversity of his dispositions. Royalty, which allows a man to act without control, affords him opportunity of discovering his real temper. Persons in the lower ranks of life, may be influenced by timidity, or the example of their superiors, and act with the view of aggrandizing themselves in their favour; but he

* Heb. iii. 12.

who presides over a kingdom, acts without restraint. In this exalted station, we behold human nature in its true light, undisguised by false colouring, acting agreeably to the dictates of a mind unfettered, unawed, and perfectly free from the fear of man. If we form an estimate of the human character upon the history of the kings of Israel and Judah recorded in scripture, it must be highly unfavourable to mankind. Though laid under peculiar obligations to the service of God, and the practice of goodness, we see united in their conduct, the most daring wickedness, attended with contumacy in a high degree.

Neither will I tempt the Lord. By this expression the king of Judah, recollecting the prohibition written in the divine law, ‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*,’ seems to have intended to justify his conduct. What a strange abuse of words, to call obedience to a plain command of God, tempting him! Men tempt the Lord in two different ways. Either by heedlessly rushing into known hazardous and dangerous circumstances, from which they cannot expect to extricate themselves, whilst they pretend to trust in God for deliverance. Such was the temptation presented by Satan to our blessed Saviour, to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, suggesting to him a promise of divine protection and safety. Or when dissatisfied with the means which they possess of acquiring the knowledge of truth and duty, and of supplying their necessities, they require farther extraordinary means of conviction and relief, which they have no right to demand or expect. In this manner, the unbelieving Jews tempted the Son of God whilst he tabernacled upon earth. After all the stupendous wonders he wrought among them, they insolently desired him to perform more signs and wonders; and because the wisdom of God refused to gratify them, they obstinately persisted in rejecting

* Deut. vi. 16.

him. In neither of these ways could Ahaz have tempted the Lord, by asking of him a sign, after he was fully authorized to mention what sort of sign would be most acceptable and satisfactory. The excuse was only a frivolous pretext, by which he foolishly declined to obey the divine command. There were, however, probably, other reasons which determined him not to ask any sign from God. By complying with the prophet's requisition, he would have been obliged to abandon his project of calling into his assistance the king of Assyria, and to have reposed his confidence upon the Lord alone, whom, in his pride and wickedness, he had contemned.—Every unbelieving, disobedient transgressor is an Ahaz, and proudly rejects the kind offers made to him by the Lord. The great God graciously invites men to return to him, from whom they have deeply revolted; to place their dependence upon him alone, relying upon the ample security he hath given by Immanuel, of complete deliverance from all enemies. But, alas! many reject these kind offers of salvation, and flight him who is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against*. If the refusal of temporal deliverance, and the sign which was ready to be given of its certainty, was an enormous crime, how great must be their sin who reject eternal salvation, and the signs which the divine wisdom offers, as security for its completion in due time? ‘See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven †.’

13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David, *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

* Luke ii. 34.

† Heb. xii. 25.

The hypocrisy and incredulity, which Ahaz discovered in his reply, are here severely reprehended; the false colours by which he endeavoured to cover his bad dispositions are taken away, and the real cause of his refusal is assigned.—The prophet addresses the king not by his own name, but by that of his great and renowned progenitor; in this manner reproaching him with his ungrateful conduct, and testifying his just indignation upon that account. In a manner similar to this, Moses expressed his displeasure against Korah and his company, who stirred up rebellion in the camp of Israel, when he thus spake: ‘Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi *,’ &c. Hear now, ye degenerate offspring of the illustrious family of God’s servant, David, who was eminently distinguished by being a man according to God’s own heart, and in whose conduct ye may see a remarkable example of faith and obedience. To you I now speak; from you I now demand the closest attention to what I am about to deliver in the name of God, solicitous that it may make deep impression on your hearts.—The prophets often introduce the messages which they brought from God, by demanding the most serious attention from those to whom they were sent; to which, in every view, they were most certainly entitled. From us they claim equal regard, which at all times we ought carefully to express. If we are displeased with those who will not hear us, and surprised when God doth not grant our prayers, how much more may Jehovah be offended, when we refuse to hearken to his precepts?

Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Does it seem, in your view, a light and trivial matter, to act in the disrespectful and undutiful manner you have done? There is a peculiar sharpness and poignancy in this reproof, which is increased by the questionary form in which

* Numb. xvi. 8.

it is delivered. It resembles the pointed interrogatory which the ambassadors, sent by the congregation of the Lord, directed to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh: 'Is the iniquity of Peor (said they) too little for us, from which we are not cleansed unto this day, that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord *?' Men are wearied and fatigued, when their strength is exhausted, their patience worn out, their expectations disappointed, and their designs counteracted. Ahaz, and his court, had wearied Judah with acts of oppression, and wickedness of various kinds, by which the strength and patience of the nation were exhausted: they had wearied the remnant of the godly with their criminal and profane practices, whereby they dreaded their hopes would be frustrated; and they had wearied Isaiah with the froward, hypocritical answers that had been given to the gracious messages that he had brought from God. And as if all this had been too little, to discover their contempt of the Almighty, the prophet farther inquires, Will ye weary my God also? Properly speaking, the everlasting God, the Lord, fainteth not, neither is weary. He is never in the least tired of upholding the great fabric of the universe, of preserving all the creatures in existence, and of distributing among them the fruits of his bounty to supply their necessities. The expression, therefore, must be understood metaphorically, respecting external divine dispensations, which correspond to the actions of men, when they are weary, and act in a manner suited to this condition. In this sense, the Most High is said to be weary, when men, by a long continued course of bad conduct, and frequently repeated acts of wickedness, provoke him no longer to exercise patience toward them, but without delay to execute upon them righteous vengeance for their iniquities. Thus it

* Josh. xxii. 17, 18.

comes to pass, when people, assuming the appearance of morality in their lives, indulge atheistical, wicked dispositions in their hearts; when, through hypocrisy and perversity, they arraign the dispensations of divine providence, as inconsistent and different from what in truth they are. In this manner, the king of Judah wearied God by his incredulity, dissimulation, and obstinate rejection of the condescending offers made him by his servant the prophet, which, with humility and gratitude, he ought to have accepted.—From hence we learn, as from other passages of scripture, that the great God is pleased to consider the indignities and injuries done to his servants as done to himself. He that despiseth or wearieth them, despiseth and wearieth God: he that heareth them, heareth him that sent them: he that believeth not their testimony, and complieth not with their counsels, is reckoned thus to act toward him with whose message they are intrusted. They that lie to them, lie not to men, but to God*. Beware then of wearying God, by refusing to comply with the admonitions and offers he gives you by his servants; but now, while it is called to-day, hearken to his voice, and obey his call.

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

The prophet here declares, that the Lord would give Ahaz and his people a most wonderful sign, by which his promises of mercy and deliverance were to be fully confirmed.—The connection of what is promised with the narration contained in the preceding verses, is marked by the word *therefore*; which seems to import, that since the king, through pretended modesty, and feigned reverence for God,

* See 1 Sam. viii. 7. Luke x. 16.

had refused, after he was desired, to ask a sign or proof of the certain accomplishment of the foretold deliverance, and though on that account the Lord was justly displeased, he would not deprive his people of a sign, for confirming their faith in the important truth of which he had given them assurance. Such is the sovereign mercy and grace of God, that it triumphs over the obstinate wickedness of men, and derives peculiar glory from the perverse disobedience of transgressors. The intimation given of this sign, is introduced with the word *behold*, which is often used in scripture, to excite and preserve attention to somewhat wonderful, extraordinary, and interesting, that the speaker or writer was about to mention or describe. In obedience to this call, let us contemplate with admiration and gratitude this astonishing sign, which the Lord himself was pleased to give, for establishing the faith of his people in his promise.—The miracle foretold is thus expressed :

A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son. Between these words of Isaiah, and the fact recorded by the apostle Matthew *, there is the most intimate correspondence, and perfect agreement, both relating to the same great event. The prophecy revealed the purpose and counsel of Jehovah; the accomplishment declared his fidelity and veracity: the prediction announced the certain future event; and the event, when it came to pass, fulfilled the prediction. The inspired apostle, therefore, remarks, when recording the nativity of Jesus Christ, ‘ Now all this was done, ‘ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the ‘ Lord by the prophet,’ in the words before us; which are expressly applied to the Virgin Mary, and her Son Jesus Christ. The fact, which Matthew relates, happened, that what was here predicted might be accomplished, not in a figurative sense, or in way of accommodation, but in the literal and proper sense of

* Matth. i. 23.

the words. To no other persons can they with justice be referred: not to the wife of Ahaz, and his son Hezekiah, who was born long before this prediction was delivered; nor to the wife of Isaiah, and any of his sons, none of whom was ever elevated to the throne of Judah. Nor can any event of which we have knowledge, that came to pass about the time this sign was foretold, be considered (without offering violence to the plain meaning of language) as the accomplishment of what is here declared. We, therefore, conclude, that the sign promised was the miraculous nativity of Jesus Christ, to whose birth the wonderful circumstances mentioned in this verse precisely agree. The chief difficulty which arises from this exposition, is this, How the birth of the great Messiah, which did not happen for ages after the deliverance was wrought for Judah, for confirming the certainty of which it is said to be a sign, could be a proof or evidence of its accomplishment? In answer to this obvious objection, I observe, the astonishing mystery to which the prophet refers, was the sure foundation of all the glorious deliverances which God was pleased to work for his church in every age; and Isaiah, foreseeing, by the spirit of prophecy, this great expected event, places it full in the view of the godly among his countrymen, for the establishment of their faith and hope in God, in their present alarming condition. From the contemplation of this altogether new thing in the earth, greatly more wonderful than the preservation of Ahaz and his people from the threatened destruction by their enemies, they ought to have been encouraged to wait with patience for the fulfilment of the promised interposition of divine providence.—How admirable the condescension and grace of God, who, notwithstanding the obstinate refusal of the king of Judah to ask a sign, either in the depth or in the height, was pleased to unite these extremes in the sign, of which he here gives the most explicit assurance!

And shall call his name Immanuel; which being interpreted, signifies, *God with us*, God manifest in our flesh, tabernacling among men, deeply engaged in promoting our best interests. God indeed is with us, by the immensity of his divine presence, which fills heaven and earth, and extends to all creatures and all places, as the royal psalmist beautifully represents in Psalm cxxxix. God is also with us, in respect of his providential dispensations, whereby, according to his good pleasure, he disposes of all persons and events, so as to advance his own glory, and the good of his people. In neither of these senses of the expression have we the full import of the name given to the illustrious Person, whose miraculous birth is here foretold. It denotes, that, in consequence of his nativity, God is with us, in the most intimate and friendly manner, to afford us the richest displays of his favour and love, to fulfil all his exceeding great and precious promises, to effectuate all the benevolent purposes of his tender mercy and loving-kindness, to remove our guilt, to dispel our ignorance, to conquer our enemies, to bless and sanctify, to preserve and save us. Words cannot express what is comprehended in the name Immanuel. God being with us, he employs all his perfections for promoting our safety and felicity; he confers upon us the most important privileges; he taketh part with us against our enemies; he removes every obstruction that lies in the way to glory, honour, and immortality; he conducts us through all the mazes of this life, and is ever active in promoting our real and eternal happiness. Though the child born of a virgin had been absolutely perfect, his obedience commensurate to the demands of the divine law, and his substitution and sufferings for sinners voluntary, had he been no more than man, he could not have been equal to the arduous work of redemption. If deeply convinced of our obnoxiousness to the displeasure of the Almighty, we might sink into despair, were we not solemnly assured in the scriptures,

tures, that a divine person, in human nature, engaged for us. This wonderful condescension gave immense value to all that he did, and to all that he suffered: by his almighty arm he can easily vanquish all the difficulties that might obstruct our salvation. This alone affords a solid ground of hope to sinners of mankind, awakened to a deep concern what they shall do to be saved.—We may now adopt the triumphant challenge of the apostle Paul, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us.’ Notwithstanding the many difficulties and enemies with which we have to contend, we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us. God is with us, to protect and assist, to direct and bless us.

15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

Two remarkable circumstances are here mentioned, respecting the child whose nativity the prophet had foretold.—Butter and honey are articles of food, which are well known to denote the plenty and peace of the country in which they are enjoyed in abundance. Upon this provision of peaceful and plentiful times, with which the land of Canaan abounded in such seasons, the promised child was to be sustained. Prior to this period, the countries belonging to the two kings who distressed Judah, were to be desolated; in consequence of which, that kingdom was to enjoy the blessings of peace and plenty.—*That he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.* The expression, according to this version, is involved in much obscurity and difficulty, and seems to have little or no meaning. What good sense do you perceive in the declaration, that a child shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to refuse evil, and choose good? This food, I suppose, does not produce these effects more than any other kind of wholesome sustenance. The obscurity of this passage is greatly removed, by

rendering the Hebrew particle translated *that*, by the word *when*, in doing which I am supported by good authority *. By this small alteration, the consistency, connection, and meaning of our prophet appear more evident. Butter and honey shall he eat, when he shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good: after he arrived, in some degree, at the use of reason, and became capable of distinguishing the goodness and badness of objects, of discerning the difference between truth and error, and of perceiving what is pleasing and offensive to God, the distressful times of war should be over, and the land be relieved from its enemies; in consequence whereof, he should share in the provisions peculiar to those who enjoy peace and plenty. This prediction was remarkably verified in Immanuel, in whom this whole prophecy received its full completion. That wonderful child, the hope of Israel, and the salvation thereof, was born and grew up in peaceable times, in the plentiful country of Judea, where he lived upon those provisions with which the inhabitants were generally supplied.—How admirable the grace of our blessed Immanuel, who condescended to be born in humble circumstances, and to live on the homely fare by which the poorer sort of people were maintained! This wonderful humiliation of the Son of God, to which he submitted for our sakes, ought ever to animate our praises and obedience to our compassionate Saviour; who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich †.

16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

The prophet applies the sign above mentioned, to confirm the promise he had delivered, and de-

* See Dr. Lowth's Notes on Isaiah, p. 62. † 2 Cor. viii. 9.
termines

termines the time of its accomplishment.—Interpreters widely differ in opinion respecting the particular child intended in this verse. Some have supposed, that Shear-jashub, Isaiah's son, whom the Lord ordered the prophet to take with him, when he went to meet Ahaz, was the child spoken of: others have imagined, that Maher-shalal-hash-baz, another son of Isaiah, afterward mentioned, was the child here meant: a third class think, that the words intend no other person than the child whose name was called Immanuel. However different, at first sight, these sentiments may appear, the period of time fixed for the predicted deliverance of Judah, from the hostile attacks of Ephraim and Syria, is nearly the same. Indeed if the child first mentioned, namely, Shear-jashub, was intended, as he might now be about a year old, the time limited must have been shorter by the space of about two years, than it could have been if his brother Maher-shalal-hash-baz was meant, who, according to my supposition, was not born for twelve months, or thereby, after the time in which this prophecy was delivered. If the prophet speaks, as I suppose, of the child Immanuel, the time specified for the destruction of the two kings by whom the Jews were distressed, will not vary much from that which is fixed by those who are of a different opinion. The obvious and literal meaning of the prediction seems to me to be this: Within the time that a young woman, now a virgin, should conceive and bring forth a child, and that child should arrive at such an age as to distinguish between good and evil, that is, within a few years, the enemies of Judah were to be destroyed. The house of David, by this lesser deliverance, were to have a sign, type, assurance, and pledge of a greater deliverance which they expected, which was announced in the name Immanuel, and had been frequently foretold by the prophets. The prophecy being introduced with such solemnity, the sign so marked as the gift of God, the terms in which the prediction

prediction is delivered being so peculiar, and the name of the child so expressive, we may justly imagine, that, in minds prepared by general expectation of a great deliverer to arise from the family of David, they raised hopes far beyond what the present occasion suggested; especially when, in the subsequent prophecy, this child is represented as the Lord and Prince of Judah. The apostle Matthew, therefore, in applying this prophecy to Jesus Christ, does not merely accommodate the words of the prophet to a suitable case, which was not in Isaiah's view, but takes them in their strictest and most important sense, according to the principal design for which they were intended*.

The land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. You will recollect, that the prophet was now addressing Ahaz, the king of Judah; and then you may be fully satisfied, that the land which he abhorred, and held in detestation, was the land of Ephraim and Syria, whose princes had entered into a confederacy against Judea, and were uniting their forces, to reduce that country into their subjection. Ahaz would doubtless abominate the inhabitants of these kingdoms, on account of their perfidy respecting former treaties of alliances, in acting in hostility toward him and his people, with whom they ought to have preserved a friendly correspondence; and in having projected the scheme of dethroning him and his family, and of elevating another in his room to the throne of Judah. The detested land of Ephraim and Syria was to be forsaken of both her kings, Pekah and Rezin, who had conspired against the family of David: it was to be exhausted of its treasures, deprived of its forces, and evacuated by its inhabitants. This great and unexpected devastation was to be

* Those who wish to see this difficult passage of scripture more fully explained, may consult Bishop Hurd's Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies, vol. i. p. 129. *et seq.* Maclaurin's Essay on the Prophecies, p. 119. *et seq.* Saurin's Sermons, translated by Robinson, vol. ii. serm. iii. Vitringa's Comment. *in loc.*

made in a short time by the kings of Assyria, as plainly intimated in the following verse.—The accomplishment of this prophecy seems to be limited within the space of three, four, or at most five years, after its delivery. About that time, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, overturned the kingdom of Syria, slew Rezin the king, and carried away captive the Syrians into Assyria and Media*. Hoshea, the son of Eiah, slew Pekah, the king of Israel, and the kingdom of Ephraim was almost totally destroyed, in the twentieth year of Jotham, the son of Uzziah†.—By this passage of scripture, we are instructed in the exact foreknowledge of God, to whom all his works are known from the beginning; and the firm stability of his counsels and purposes, who doth in heaven and in earth according to his pleasure; and that all the circumstances relative to his dispensations of providence and grace, are accurately adjusted. We are also taught the important lesson of firmly relying upon the unchangeable faithfulness of Jehovah, which is engaged to fulfil all the promises he hath given of deliverance and safety to his people, however improbable their accomplishment may appear. His word is irrevocable; his power is invincible, and cannot be resisted; his purpose is immutable, and cannot be disannulled, and will certainly be executed at the determined season.

17 ¶ The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy fathers house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; *even* the king of Assyria.

In this and the following verses, down to the end of the chapter, the prophet foretels the invasions and desolations which the Jewish nation was to suffer from the Assyrians.—Notwithstanding the promise of deliverance from the confederate kings of Ephraim and

* 2 Kings xvi. 9.

† 2 Kings xv. 30.

Syria, confirmed by the assurance of the nativity of Immanuel, God, justly displeas'd with the incredulity and disobedience of Ahaz, and the sins of his people, directs his servant to place fully in their view the grievous calamities, which he was about to inflict on them by means of the Assyrians. For this purpose, he first represents the incursions of that powerful nation, and then the consequent desolation with which they were to be attended.—The prediction is abruptly introduced; and the judgments here denounced, are declared to proceed from Jehoyah. People are apt to look at second causes, and to rise no higher than the instruments who are employed in distressing them; whereas, in the words before us, and in many other passages of scripture, God is represented as the chief agent in chastizing the nations, whilst those who execute the judgments he inflicts, are only as the rod, the staff, and the axe, in his hand. The wrath which Shishak, king of Egypt, was to pour upon Jerusalem, was the wrath of God; and that prince was no more than the vial from which it was to be conveyed. The cleanness of teeth, and want of bread, which Israel experienced in all their cities, was sent them by the Lord God. The pestilence which burst forth like fire in the house of Joseph, and devoured it, proceeded from the Lord God of hosts. The armies of Assyria, which marched into Judea, received their orders from the Most High over all the earth. These and similar awful judgments, never make their appearance until they have got a divine commission. If the wild beasts destroy, it is God who sends them; if the pestilence desolate the land, it is God who gives the command; if the sword devour, it is because the Lord hath stretched out his hand. If days commence that shall exceed in devastation and horror all that have preceded them, it is affirmed, in this verse, that the Lord brings them. Ahaz, his people, and his fathers house, were great transgressors, and consequently the authors of their own calamities.

Their

Their sin proved their destruction. The armies of Assyria could not have made one captive, or one breach among them, had not their iniquities kindled against them the divine displeasure.—My brethren, the principles of destruction are in ourselves. Sin, like the moth, which eats away the garment in which it is bred, consumes those in whom it is indulged, unless it is destroyed. Abounding iniquity in kingdoms and states, like fatal distempers which prey upon the human constitution, and prognosticate the dissolution of our frame, becomes the certain forerunner of their overthrow, and the procuring causes of their ruin. Let us then strenuously endeavour, in dependence upon God, to check the progress of those sins, which, unless they are abandoned, will prove most dangerous to ourselves, and the community of which we are members.

Days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria. The calamities which were to overtake Ahaz, his family, and people, were to exceed those wherewith the Jews had been visited, since the separation of Israel from Judah. That remarkable revolt happened, you know, in the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon; and took its rise from the tyranny of that rash young prince, who, rejecting the advice of aged counsellors, refused to hearken to the remonstrances of his subjects. After that memorable period, Judah sustained many grievous calamities, all of which were to be exceeded by those which are here foretold. Of the truth of this prediction, you may be sensible, by comparing the miseries they had suffered at different times, with those inflicted upon them by the Assyrians, whereby this prophecy was fulfilled. Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, greatly distressed and spoiled Ahaz, as we read, 2 Chron. xxviii. 20. Afterward Sennacherib, in the reign of Hezekiah, possessed himself of the cities of Judah, laid waste the country, and struck with terror the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as we learn from the thirty-second chapter of Second Chronicles.

In the days of Manasseh, the captain of the host of the king of Assyria took Manasseh among the thorns, bound him in fetters, and carried him away to Babylon, as is written, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11. And again, in the days of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came and bound the king of Judah in fetters, and carried him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the Lord, as recorded, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10. By contemplating the calamities sustained by the Jews in the several invasions of the Assyrians, you will find, that they were greater than the distresses which they had suffered in former times, from Shishak, king of Egypt, under Rehoboam; from the Philistines and Arabians, under Joram; from the Syrians, under Joash; or the Ethiopians, in the reign of Aha. In this manner you may be fully satisfied of the truth of the prediction before us.— Let the review of the terrible judgments which God inflicted upon the Jews, in accomplishing this threatening, excite us, for whose instruction they were recorded, to a holy fear of offending him, who doth terrible things in righteousness. Afraid of his dread displeasure, let us carefully avoid those transgressions, which exposed them to such direful calamities.

18 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall hiss for the fly, that *is* in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria.

In this and the following verse, the prophet illustrates the prediction delivered in the foregoing one, by figuratively describing the instruments who were to be employed in executing the above threatening.— It is manifest, from the connection and design of this prophecy, that it ought not to be interpreted in the literal, but in the figurative sense of the words. In this view, the fly, that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, seems intended to denote the
 numerous

numerous troops of that once powerful kingdom, which is said to have been able to muster an army of four hundred thousand men. In prophetic language, the forces of Egypt might be significantly expressed by a fly, as that land abounded with great quantities of this kind of insect; and to intimate the vast numbers of Egyptians who were to be called forth to action, the surprising rapidity with which they were to march, when, after the manner of flies, they were to alight in Judea, that they might suck out the strength and vigour of the Jewish nation. The Egyptian army was to march from the uttermost part of the rivers of that kingdom. The great river Nile, by which the land of Egypt was watered, is said to have divided into seven different streams, by which it emptied itself into the sea. These, I suppose, are the rivers here intended; and from the remote places about them, called Lower Egypt, the troops here spoken of, were to march against Judah.

And for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. By the bee here mentioned, the army of Assyria seems to be meant. To this insect the Creator hath given a sharp sting, by which it defends itself, and annoys its enemies; and so affords a lively representation of people armed for war. The army of Assyria, in a special manner, resembled the bee; as it was composed of vast numbers, who were all subject to one king, all observed the strictest order and discipline, their movements were attended with a martial sound, whilst they displayed the utmost skill and fortitude in carrying on war. On these and other accounts, the troops of that empire might be spoken of under this figurative description.—For the armies of Egypt and Assyria the prophet declared, that the Lord would hiss. The expression occurred, Chap. v. 26. and seems to refer to the practice of shepherds, who, by means of a pipe, or some other instrument, called together their flocks, that they might conduct them with the greater ease and safety wherever they intended.

intended. It plainly intimates, that the Lord, who mustereth the armies of battle, would give the signal to numerous powerful armies to assemble, and march toward Judea. that they might execute his awful judgments upon its ungrateful inhabitants.

19 And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes.

No sooner doth God speak, than it is done; no sooner doth he call, than he is obeyed. All the creatures are obedient to his command; and when he gives orders, the most powerful armies never fail to execute his designs. Fire, hail, snow, vapour, and stormy wind, fulfil his pleasure; angels execute his orders; destruction and death perform what he directs; and the greatest armies among men accomplish his purposes, though oft-times there is not any thing which is farther from their intention. Though they make not his law the rule of their conduct, nor his glory the end of their actions, yet, by a secret and powerful influence, he effectually inclines and disposes them to fulfil his purposes and predictions, of which the prophet here gives assurance.—By the desolate valleys, are doubtless meant those fertile plains in the land of Judea, which were formerly covered with corns, and beautified with towns and villages. These were to be totally laid waste by the hostile incursions of the powerful enemies of Judah, who should there take up their occasional residence.—*And in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes.* In these expressions there is an obvious reference to the figurative language used in the foregoing verse, where the Egyptians and Assyrians are spoken of by the names of the fly and the bee, which are well known to frequent holes of the rocks, large thorns, and beautiful bushes. When, therefore, it

is foretold, that the hostile armies of these nations, who are the subjects of this prediction, should rest in these places, the words, when divested of figure, denote, that they should occupy in the land of Judah places of every sort, high and low, great and small, frequented and obscure, the cultivated grounds, the fortified cities, the magnificent edifices, and remote villages.—This prophecy received its accomplishment, when Necho, king of Egypt, came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates, when Josiah went out and fought with him in the valley of Megiddo, where the king of Judah was slain, the land was made tributary, and Jehoahaz, whom the Jews elevated to the throne in room of his father, was deposed from the royal dignity, as you read, 2 Chron. xxxv. 20. And afterward, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Assyria, came up against Jehoiachin, and the Lord sent against Judah, to destroy it, bands of the Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and of the children of Ammon, according to the word that he spake by his servants the prophets, this prediction was farther fulfilled*.—True and faithful is God to all his promises and threatenings. I am the Lord, saith he; I will speak, and the word that I will speak shall come to pass. Wicked men often suppose, that threatened judgments will not be executed; or if they shall, that they will not be inflicted for a long time; and therefore they resolve, like the Jews of old, that they will not hearken, or presume to charge the servants of the Most High with falsehood. Thus, by various dangerous deceptions, they put far from them that word which ought to be prized by them as the word of salvation. Aware of this dangerous practice, let us take heed of deceiving ourselves by frivolous pretexts, and rejecting the counsel of God revealed for our benefit. Keeping fully in view the veracity of Jehovah, demonstrated in the accom-

* See 2 Kings xxiv. 1. and following verses.

plishment of his predictions, let us trust in his promises, and stand in awe of his threatenings.

20 In the same day shall the LORD shave with a razor *that is* hired, *namely*, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard.

In these words, the desolation to which the land of Judah was to be exposed, from the incursions of the Assyrians, is illustrated by another similitude.—At the same time, or soon after the foregoing prediction should be fulfilled, the one now before us was to receive its accomplishment. The instruments whom God was to employ for the purpose here mentioned, signified by the hired razor, were those beyond the river, the king of Assyria, whom Ahaz had hired, by his own treasures, and those of the temple, to come and help him against the Syrians. That powerful monarch, and his vast army, the great God was pleased to use as the instruments of punishing the Jews; and to this they were encouraged by the prospect of rich spoil, and the acquisition of territory. It is the glorious prerogative of Jehovah, to send afflictions and calamities upon states and kingdoms, by whatever messengers he pleases. ‘ Shall there be evil
‘ in a city, and the Lord hath not done it *, Evil
‘ came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusa-
‘ lem †.’—The judgments with which Judah was to be visited, were to be very sharp; and, like a razor, to cut deep, and take all clean before them. They were not merely to lop off some luxuriances, but to raze to the very foundation the privileges which they most valued, and of which they most boasted. Judah was to be separated from the worship and presence of God, and deprived of the important advantages

* Amos iii. 6.

† Micah i. 12.

they had enjoyed. And as shaving the hair was reckoned among the Jews (who never cut their beards, except in seasons of mourning and grief) a mark of reproach, as well as a sign of sorrow, so the calamities here predicted, were to prove their disgrace, as well as the occasion of lamentation and wo.

The head, and the hair of the feet : and it shall also consume the beard. By the head, may be meant the king, the princes of the kingdom, and the great men of the nation, who were exalted to dignity and authority in the state, who were its beauty and ornament, and gave direction to the whole body of the people. By the hair of the feet, may be signified the common people, who occupy the lower stations in society, the multitude who formed the strength and vigour of the nation. By the beard, may be intended the judges, grave, wise, and venerable counsellors, the priests, the prophets, and ministers of the Lord, who were renowned for their knowledge, prudence, and influence over the community. All these different descriptions of people were to be cut off by the Assyrian power, and separated from the body of the Jewish nation, in a sudden and violent manner, even as the razor cuts off the hair from the face. To this direful event we may apply the words of the prophet Jeremiah, in the book of Lamentations: ‘The Lord hath troden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me, to crush my young men: the Lord hath troden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine-press.—My priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls*.’—The accomplishment of this prediction you may read, 2 Kings xxiv. 10. to 17.—No wonder that David, though a mighty king, and a great warrior, though he feared not the bear, the lion, or the giant, should have been afraid

* Lam. i. 15. 19.

of God's righteous judgments. How awful and tremendous are the representations given of them in scripture, where God threatens to be as a lion to Ephraim, and a young lion to the house of Judah * ; to be as a strong wind, and overflowing shower † ; to be as devouring fire, and a fiery oven ‡ ; and to be as a flail, that, by threshing, divideth the corn from the straw ||. By devouring fire, by thunder and lightning, by tempests and earthquakes, by the sword, famine, and pestilence, the Lord executes upon men most terrible judgments ; and therefore we ought to fear before him, to stand in awe, and not to sin. This important, yet difficult lesson is inculcated, I may say a thousand times, in the word of God, by innumerable different ways, worthy of our most serious attention.

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep.

This and the following verses of this chapter, contain an elegant description of a country depopulated and left to run wild, the consequence of the divine judgments which God was to inflict upon the land of Judah by means of the Assyrians.—It exhibits that once rich and populous country, after it was shaven, as a mere solitude, divested of its numerous inhabitants, the vineyards and corn-fields over-run with briars and thorns, the land given up to wild beasts, yielding an extensive range of pasture for the very few remaining cattle ; and the small number of people that were left, not living upon the produce of cultivated grounds, but supplying themselves with necessary food by means of hunting.—One effect of the above-mentioned calamities is described in the words before us. In that day, at the time immediately following the

* Hosea v. 14.
|| Hab. iii. 12.

† Ezek. xiii. 13.

‡ Psal. xxi. 9.

execution of the judgments foretold, a man who might formerly have been opulent and respectable, now reduced to meanness and poverty, in the midst of solitude, should be employed in taking care of one large and two small cattle. Exceeding few people, therefore, and these in very indigent circumstances, must have been left in the land of Judah, after it was desolated by the Assyrians, at the period here referred to.

22 And it shall come to pass for the abundance of milk *that* they shall give, he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat *that is left* in the land.

So rich and fertile was the land of Canaan, that it abounded with the best and most excellent provisions; and therefore it was often described as a land that flowed with milk and honey.—That fruitful country is thus beautifully represented in the song which Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel: ‘The Lord made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields, and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat, and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape*.’ At the time the prophecy before us was accomplished, the fields, which were formerly in high cultivation, were to be left in pasturage; and the few people that remained in the land, were to live not upon corn, wine, and oil, but on butter and honey, the production of an uncultivated country that had suffered the ravages of war. The words are easy to be understood, and require little or no discussion. The cattle in the land of Judah, that escaped the hands

* Deut. xxxii. 13, 14.

of the enemy, having large pastures in which they fed, would supply the surviving inhabitants with abundance of good milk, and plenty of butter, by means of which they were chiefly to be supported. The fields returning to their natural uncultivated state, would afford excellent food to the great number of bees with which that country abounded; in consequence of which, honey would be more plentiful than any other article of provision. By means of these natural productions, the inhabitants, that were left in the land, were to be mostly sustained.

23 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverings, it shall *even* be for briers and thorns.

Another instance is mentioned, of the dismal consequences attending the execution of the divine judgments above predicted.—The land of Judah being left uncultivated, through the want of hands, the grounds formerly most remarkable for their high improvement and fertility, were to become barren, and covered with brambles. The silvering was a Jewish coin, in value about two shillings and sixpence of our money, so that a thousand of them amounts to one hundred and twenty-five pounds Sterling. I shall not determine, whether the prophet means, that the thousand vines, of which he speaks, were themselves worth that sum; or, if the yearly produce in fruit or wine amounted to that value, at an average. In either sense, the prophecy is nearly of the same import. Those beautiful, fruitful, and valuable fields and vineyards, which were formerly the ornament and riches of the country, through the devastation made by the enemy, were to become a thicket of briers and thorns. Nor was this remarkable change to extend only to a few such places, but to every place; all the vineyards, of any consequence, were to be reduced to
this

this waste and desolate condition. In this manner the remark of the royal poet was verified in the land of Judea: ‘The Lord turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground: a fruitful field into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.—They are diminished, and brought low, through oppression, affliction, and sorrow*.’

24 With arrows and with bows shall *men* come thither; because all the land shall become briers and thorns.

To amplify the ruinous state of that once delightful, fertile country, the prophet declares, that those who should make an incursion into Judea, would be obliged to take with them implements of war, to defend themselves from the attacks of robbers and wild beasts, as well as to kill the game that might serve them for food.—Bows and arrows were the instruments used by warriors and hunters in ancient times; and thus accoutred were those to be, who entered the land of Judah, after the above-mentioned desolating judgments were inflicted.—The reason is subjoined in the latter part of the verse, *because all the land shall become briers and thorns*. Brambles were not only to cover some particular spots, which had been formerly fertile and beautiful, but they were to over-run the whole land, and to cover the face of the country. What a surprising change! Instead of people employed with spades, pruning-hooks, and other instruments of husbandry, improving the grounds, and cultivating the vines; and others, with baskets and vessels, gathering the finest grapes and olives, of which were made excellent wine and oil; they were to go armed with bows and arrows, for their protec-

* Psal. cvii. 33, 34. 39.

tion from beasts of prey, as well as for killing those which were necessary for their sustenance.

25 And *on* all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns : but it shall be for the fending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle.

The hills and mountains with which the land of Judea abounded, were not to be exempted from the visible effects of the general desolation which reached to all other places.—The high grounds, that had been improved and inclosed with much labour, and at a vast expence, were to be laid open for pasturage to oxen and lesser cattle, which discovered not the least marks of fear to break through the hedges wherewith they were fenced. It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the subject.—Such, in fact, was the desolate state of Judah in the days of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, when the whole country was laid waste by the incursions of its enemies, after multitudes of the inhabitants were slain by the sword, others perished by the pestilence, and the whole land was left like an unfrequented desert. The rich grounds, which were formerly inclosed with hedges, and exceedingly fruitful, were laid open to the cattle, and over-run with briers and thorns, as we learn from 2 Kings xxv. 12. *et seq.*—How awful and desolating are the judgments which the Almighty executes upon kingdoms and churches, who obstinately persist in provoking him by their sins! The happiness and prosperity of empires and states is not perpetual, but often varies, according to their improvement or abuse of the divine goodness. Of this important truth a memorable instance hath now been presented to our view. Because the men of Judah served not the Lord with joyfulness and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore, as Moses foretold, they served their
enemies

enemies which the Lord sent against them, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things*. The remnant that were left in the land, found themselves in a wilderness, destitute of the comforts of life, of the temple-service, the instituted worship of God, and exposed to innumerable hardships and dangers.—Would you, my friends, avoid the dreadful judgments of heaven, and enjoy continued prosperity? Beware of provoking God to anger by your sins: bring forth fruit corresponding to the important advantages you enjoy, and the peculiar kindness of the Lord with which you are favoured. Remember the abuse of prosperity is extremely dangerous, and hath proved the destruction of multitudes. ‘When, therefore, thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God, for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied: then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God †.’

* Deut. xxviii. 47, 48.

† Deut. viii. 10. *et seq.*

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE come now to the second part of our prophet's fifth discourse, in which he treats of the overthrow of the kingdoms of Syria and Ephraim—the calamities to be inflicted upon the Jews by the Assyrians—and other events which were to precede the appearance of the Messiah, with some of the signs and consequences of his manifestation.—He begins with mentioning a confirming sign of the certain and sudden overthrow of the kingdoms of Syria and Ephraim, which was ordered to be given by divine authority, ver. 1.—4. He next proceeds to give a prophetic representation of the future fortunes of both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, in consequence of the Assyrian invasion, ver. 5.—8. He then addresses the Israelites and Syrians, assuring them, that their attempts against Judah would prove unsuccessful and fruitless, because God was with them, ver. 9, 10. After which, he solemnly warns the people of Judah against idolatry, divination, and other forbidden practices, to which they were inclined; and directs them to the exercise of those affections, and to that conduct, with which they ought to sustain the hostile attacks of their enemies, ver. 11. to the end of the chapter. In this, as in almost all of his discourses, the prophet connects spiritual with temporal enemies, spiritual with temporal deliverances, spiritual with temporal felicity, as will appear more fully afterward. He hath allegorized the former to the accomplishment of the latter; and, under the image of temporal mercies, he hath shadowed out spiritual blessings.

CHAP. VIII.

MOREOVER, the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a mans pen, concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

The prophet begins by setting forth the divine authority by which he acted, in the affair he proceeds to describe.—To the instructions which the Lord formerly gave Isaiah, he added the following: *Take thee a great roll, &c.*; or, according to the Bishop of London's new translation, "Take unto thee a large mirror." The learned translator supposes, that the Hebrew word here rendered *roll*, is not derived from one that signifies, to roll, but from one signifying, to make clear or bright by rubbing, to polish, to shew: hence the word before us signifies, a polished tablet of metal, such as was anciently used for a mirror, instead of the glass ones in fashion among us. The prophet is commanded to take a large mirror, or polished tablet, sufficient for him to engrave upon it with a graving instrument, in deep and legible characters, as might be easily read and understood by those for whose instruction it was intended—Maher-shalal-hash-baz; which being interpreted, signifies, to hasten the spoil, to take quickly the prey. In this concise manner, he was ordered to record the subject and sum of the prophecy, relating to the destruction of Damascus and Samaria by the Assyrians. The person who was to make haste to the spoil, was the king of Assyria, whom God used as the rod of his anger, and the staff of his indignation, wherewith he severely chastized the men of Judah. This ambitious prince, animated by the prospect of the spoil and plunder which he expected to acquire in Judea, was to undertake an expedition against that country with the utmost dispatch and alacrity. Similar to the order which our prophet at this time received

ceived from God, was that given to Jeremiah, where he was thus commanded; ‘ Take thee a roll of a
 ‘ book, and write therein all the words that I have
 ‘ spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah,
 ‘ and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto
 ‘ thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day *.’
 What kind attention to the interests of mankind hath the blessed God discovered at all times, in the instructions which he hath communicated to his servants the prophets! A remarkable instance of this lies now before us, in the information he conveyed by Isaiah, to the kingdoms of Judah, Ephraim, and Syria, of an approaching important event, wherein they were deeply interested; of which we, as well as they, ought to make proper improvement.

2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.

The transaction here narrated, was no doubt done in obedience to the orders which our prophet received from God, which, for the sake of brevity, he only in part recorded in the foregoing verse.—Having got a large polished tablet, and a graving instrument, or a great roll, and a man’s pen, that he might execute his orders with the greater solemnity, and the transaction be legally confirmed, he provides two respectable, faithful witnesses to attest the fact. I suppose these men were to subscribe their names in the roll, or to insert them in the writing-tablet, as witnesses, after the manner of an instrument intended for public use, that they might give weight and authority to this prediction, for the conviction of Ahaz and his people.—One of these witnesses was Uriah the priest. Though this man afterward assited Ahaz in idolatrous practices, and built him an altar after the

* Jer. xxxvi. 2.

pattern which the king sent him from Damascus, he seems at this time to have been a person of good character and unquestionable veracity, as well as respectability, on account of the sacred office with which he was invested. The other witness, which our prophet called to his assistance, was Zechariah, the son of Jereb-berchiah. He was probably a Levite, one of the sons of Afaph, who, in the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, assembled with his brethren, and sanctified themselves, at the commandment of the king, to cleanse the house of the Lord, as we read, 2 Chron. xxix. 13. 15.—How exact the obedience, how admirable the candour, which our prophet displayed, in executing the order he received from God! Let us imitate him in these respects, and endeavour faithfully to perform every part of the office assigned us.

3 And I went unto the prophetess, and she conceived and bare a son; then said the LORD to me, Call his name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

In this verse, Isaiah mentions another express command that he received from God, with the circumstance which gave rise to this order.—According to the custom of the Hebrews, and some other nations, women derive their names from their husbands, or the professions which they follow; though this practice does not correspond altogether with the idiom of our language, and the phraseology used among us. By the prophetess, the wife of our prophet seems plainly to be intended. About this time she conceived and brought forth a son, whom the Lord, by some revelation he afforded his servant, directed to be called Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the very name which was required to be written in the roll, or inserted in the polished tablet, mentioned in the first verse of this chapter. In consequence of this divine appointment, which doubtless Isaiah punctually obeyed, all who saw the child, or heard him named, were reminded of the prophecy

phesy written by our prophet, and attested by two faithful witnesses, of which this name was the comprehensive sum. You may remember, he had an elder son, called Shear-jashub, a name big with comfort, signifying, a remnant shall return. The manifold mercies of God having been abused by the people among whom the prophet acted by divine commission, and among whom he, and the children whom God gave him, were for signs and wonders in Israel, he was directed to call a younger son by a name, importing, that predicted judgments would be speedily executed.—Thus did God graciously condescend, by various ways, to instruct his people in the certainty of approaching calamities, which were soon to be inflicted upon Damascus and Samaria. Hence we ought to learn, diligently to attend to the divine admonitions which we receive of those awful judgments, which ere long shall be executed upon the impenitent and ungodly.

4 For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus, and the spoil of Samaria, shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.

In these words, the time is fixed for the accomplishment of the calamities here foretold.—Little children commonly begin to call their parents by name, when they are between two and three years of age; so that we may conclude, that within four years after the date of this prediction, the events foretold should come to pass.—The first of these respects the riches of Damascus, which was the chief city of Syria, in Asia, situated in a large plain, upon the river Chrysochoroas, lying between the range of mountains over against Lebanon and mount Hermon, one hundred and forty miles to the southward of Jerusalem. It was one of the most ancient cities in the world, being mentioned in the history of the patriarch

triarch Abraham, Gen. xiv. 15. where we are informed, that the father of the faithful, with his trained servants, pursued after the kings who had plundered his brother's son, and taken him captive, unto Hoba, which is on the left hand of Damascus. In the days of Ahaz, this city seems to have been remarkable for its opulence, and its numerous inhabitants.—The latter relates to the spoil of Samaria, which was the chief city of the kingdom of Ephraim, built by Omri, one of the kings of Israel, who bought the hill Samaria of Shemer, for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, the former owner of the hill, Samaria*. The city stood high, was well fortified, and was remarkable for the fine springs of water from which the inhabitants were plentifully supplied, and watered the vineyards, the olive-yards, and gardens, that were planted in its vicinity. It is now known by the name of Sebaste, where the remains of the palace of Ahab, king of Israel, are still to be seen.—The riches and the spoil of these royal cities are here foretold, to be taken away before the king of Assyria. The expression seems to allude to the ancient custom of conquerors, who ordered the spoils of those they had vanquished, to be carried in triumph before them into the kingdom or city for which they fought. The Assyrian monarch, with his victorious army, were to return to their own land, richly laden with the spoils they had taken in war, after having pillaged both the metropolis and the country of Ephraim, and Syria, and made great slaughter among their inhabitants.—This prediction was accordingly fulfilled within three or four years, by Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, who took Damascus, carried the people captive to Kir, and slew Rezin, as you read, 2 Kings xvi. 9.; and who also took the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and carried them captive to Assy-

* 2 Kings xvi. 23, 24.

ria, as is written, 2 Kings xv. 29.—In the review of this subject, we may say of the people of God what was said of the Romans, They were often overcome in battle, but never in war. They have been frequently in perilous circumstances; but the Most High hath always been their defence, and hath never failed seasonably to appear for their deliverance, which ought to animate us to hope and confidence in God. Like Ahaz, and his people, however, we are apt to suspect the truth and faithfulness of Jehovah, in his promises and predictions respecting the safety of his people, especially when events run counter to our expectations, and unfurmountable difficulties seem to lie in the way of their accomplishment. In despondency we are ready to exclaim, Where is the help that God hath promised in the day of trouble? Let the exact completion of the above and similar prophecies of the most unlikely events, excite us to say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge, and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust*.’

5 ¶ The LORD spake also unto me again, saying.

The prophet declares, that the Almighty, who gave him the instructions he had already mentioned, was the author of these which he is about to relate.—He affirms, that the Lord spake unto him: but he does not inform us, whether he received the following revelation by an audible voice from heaven, by a vision in the night, or by some deep impression made upon his mind. The words *also and again*, which are here used, serve to intimate, that a new period begins at this verse; and that another subject of discourse, somewhat different from the former, is introduced, containing a more full declaration of the future fortunes of Ephraim and Judah. By this assertion, he

* Psa. xci. 2.

gives the most explicit assurance of the divine authority by which he spake, in the manner following; and, therefore, we ought diligently to attend to what is written for our admonition.

6 Forfomuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoyce in Rezin and Remaliahs fon.

These words describe the criminal conduct which was the procuring cause of the judgments threatened in the following verse.—The persons whose conduct is represented, are called this people, among whom Isaiah exercised his office as a prophet, to whom he was sent with the awful message here recorded. Both the kingdoms of Judah and Israel seem to be intended in the description contained in this verse: the former charge was brought against Judah, who despised the waters of Shiloah; and the latter, against the Israelites, who rejoiced in Remaliah's son.—The sin of Judah consisted in refusing the waters of Shiloah. Shiloah or Siloam was a fountain situated on the west side of Jerufalem, toward the south-west corner, without the wall, remarkable for the excellence and abundance of its waters. From this fountain, water was conveyed, by different streams, into two pools within the city, for the use of the inhabitants; the one of which was called the Upper, and the other the Lower Pool. These waters, gently gliding along the channels that were formed for conveying them to their different receptacles, afforded, in their progress, an agreeable emblem of the kingdom of David, which, though much reduced in strength, was preserved, by the blessing of God, and continued in the line of his family, notwithstanding all the efforts of its enemies. By the waters of Shiloah that run softly, may be meant, in a figurative sense, the kingdom of the house of David, which was perpetuated, under the favour and protection of Jehovah, amidst the many hostile attempts.

attempts that were employed for its destruction. Be not surpris'd at this exposition, which accords with the interpretation of the angel, who inform'd the apostle John, 'The waters which thou sawest, are 'peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues *.' The figure is just and elegant. Waters consist of an aggregate body of liquid parts, which easily receive impression, and are carried hither and thither according to the force of the external causes by which they are agitated and directed. In these and other respects, they represent the collective body of the people, who are easily actuated and influenced by various external causes, especially by their king, or chief magistrate. Many of this people of whom the prophet speaks, contemning their native country, despising their prince, their form of government, and the advantages enjoyed by their metropolis, destitute of faith and trust in God, were reduced to the disagreeable alternative, either of surrendering themselves into the hands of the confederate kings, or of committing themselves to the protection of Assyria, whose assistance they had already implored. By adopting either of these measures, they discovered a criminal contempt of the Almighty, who was their king and defence, and who generously offer'd them his help, which they had wickedly rejected. Such was the sin and folly of Judah, which expos'd them to the invasion threaten'd in the next verses.—The sin of Israel consisted in their rejoicing in Rezin and Remaliah's son. The great bulk of the people were highly pleas'd with the treaty of alliance form'd between these two princes: they approv'd of the plans they had form'd, and the avaricious views which they avow'd, in their intended enterprize, of rendering the kingdom of Judah a province of their empire. Elated with the good fortune which had attend'd the united efforts of the confederate princes, and trusting to the strength of the com-

* Rev. xvii. 15.

bined armies, they doubted not the success of the expedition, and were already joyful in the prospect of victory. By this very culpable behaviour, they justly exposed themselves to the dread displeasure and vengeance of that God, whose beloved land they had presumptuously conspired to invade and desolate.—Hence let us be instructed highly to value and improve the important advantages with which we are favoured in this happy land, under the best form of human government, administered by the best of kings. Whilst we carefully avoid trusting in man, and making flesh our arm, let us ever be solicitous to experience the happiness of those who have the God of Jacob for their help, whose hope is in the Lord their God*.

7 Now therefore behold, the LORD bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, *even* the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks.

Upon people of the above description, God, to whom vengeance belongeth, threatens, by the prophet, to execute judgments corresponding to the crimes they had committed.—By the river here spoken of, may be meant the Euphrates, which is sometimes called the Great River, as it was the greatest with which the Israelites were acquainted, though there are larger rivers in the world, such as the Ganges, the Danube, and some others. Its waters were strong and many: they ran with great violence and rapidity from the mountains of Armenia, especially at the seasons in which the snow melted; they soon became very deep, and spread themselves to a great breadth.—In the following part of the verse, the prophet explains this figure; and teaches us, that by the waters of the river, were meant the king of

* Psa. cxlvi. 5.

Affyria, and all his glory. The glory of the king of Affyria confifted in the very numerous and well-disciplined troops which he commanded, and could march againft his enemies. According to the obfervation of the wife man, ‘ In the multitude of people ‘ is the king’s honour *.’ Much more, however, is included in the expreffion, *All his glory*. Eastern kings and princes, when they went forth anciently on great expeditions, ufed to carry along with them their wife counfellors, their renowned heroes, their nobles, and great men, as their attendants, befides their wives and concubines, who, with their military equipage, their tents, and beds, and large veffels of gold and filver, added greatly to their magnificence and fplendour. In this manner, Xerxes and Darius conducted their famous expeditions: and thefe things constituted their glory, and the glory of the king of Affyria, here fignified, by the waters of the river, ftrong and many. The prodigious army of this haughty monarch, its great ftrength, its rapid march, and the terrible noife with which it was attended, are very fignificantly represented by the waters of the river Euphrates, efpecially when it overflowed its banks, running along with irrefiftible force and impetuofity. Thefe waters, figurative of the vaft armies of Affyria, God threatens to bring down like a mighty flood upon Judah and Ifrael, as a juft punifhment for their aggravated fins, and particularly for their wicked contempt of his promifes.

8 And he fhall pafs through Judah, he fhall overflow and go over, he fhall reach *even* to the neck, and the ftretching out of his wings fhall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

The progrefs of that deftruftion with which the Affyrians were to overflow the land of Judah is here

* Prov. xiv. 28.

marked.—The metaphorical language employed in the foregoing verse is here continued, in which the Assyrians are still spoken of as a river, which, having swelled above its banks, pours its waters into the neighbouring plains. Having deluged the kingdom of Ephraim, they were next to spread desolation over the land of Judah, which was now in a low condition. Though it was to be preserved from total destruction, with which it was threatened, its inhabitants were nevertheless to find themselves in very perilous circumstances, like a man who is near being drowned, when the waters reach to his neck. In this figurative description, the kingdom of Judah is compared to a human body; by whose head the chief city of Jerusalem was intended, which, by the kind providence of God, was preserved in safety from the threatened invasion, whilst the whole country besides was overrun by the enemy, and demolished.—*And the stretching out of his wings, &c.* The most distant parts of the vast Assyrian army, which, in the military style, are called wings, are threatened to extend over the whole land, and to occupy its entire breadth, reaching from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean sea. Our prophet, contemplating these direful events, converts the prediction into the form of a complaint, which he addresses to Immanuel, the illustrious Person whose wonderful nativity he had foretold in the preceding chapter. Having his mind illuminated with the knowledge of this extraordinary character, who was at once to be the Son and Lord of David, the Son of God, the Saviour, and Guardian of his people, he invokes him to consider the forlorn condition of those whom he had appropriated to himself, as the objects of his gracious care and special protection. Thou who art God with us, whose land we possess, whose chosen city we inhabit, in whose temple we worship, pity thy peculiar people in the depths of distress, and afford us thy friendly aid, and seasonable deliverance, in the time of our extremity. ‘ God be our refuge
‘ and

‘ and strength, a very present help in trouble. There-
 ‘ fore will not we fear, though the earth be removed,
 ‘ and though the mountains be carried into the midst
 ‘ of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar, and
 ‘ be troubled, though the mountains shake with the
 ‘ swelling thereof *.’—The fulfilment of the former
 part of this prophecy you may read, 2 Kings xvii. 6.;
 and the accomplishment of the latter you may see,
 2 Kings xviii. 13, 14.—One great design of record-
 ing the prediction, and afterward the execution of
 these desolating judgments, is, that, by diligently
 considering them, we may be warned against those
 destructive practices which prevailed among the poste-
 rity of Abraham, who are set up as beacons, to di-
 rect us to keep clear of those sins in consequence of
 which they were involved in ruin. Having received
 precept upon precept upon this subject, let us learn
 this necessary lesson, and make this wise improve-
 ment of what we have now heard for our benefit.

9 ¶ Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye
 shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye
 of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall
 be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye
 shall be broken in pieces.

10 Take counsel together, and it shall come
 to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand:
 for God is with us.

In these verses, the prophet foretels, that the hostile
 attempts of the enemies of Judah should certainly be
 frustrated.—Foreseeing, by the spirit of prophecy,
 the many powerful enemies of that nation, who
 would endeavour to accomplish their destruction, and
 the disappointment with which their exertions should
 be attended, he repeatedly calls upon them, with

* Psal. xlvi. 1, 2, 3.

exultation and triumph, to adopt those measures which they might judge most likely to complete their design. The words may be considered as primarily addressed to the nations of Ephraim and Syria, who were confederated for the overthrow of Ahaz and his kingdom. As the prophet repeats the command, or invitation, a second and third time, he might have his views of the potent adversaries of his country extended to more distant future periods, in which the Assyrians, and afterward the armies of Antiochus Epiphanes, were to be defeated.—*Associate yourselves, O ye people. Assemble your troops from every quarter, Ephraimites, Syrians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans: let all your forces be collected from the most distant parts of the country, to carry into execution your intended enterprise.*—*And ye shall be broken in pieces.* Immanuel, against whose people and kingdom no weapon that is formed can prosper, shall break you with a rod of iron: he shall dash you in pieces like a potter's vessel. Your plans of operation shall be disconcerted, your armies shall be routed, your power shall be broken, and your hostile purposes abandoned.—*And give ear all ye of far countries; however distant in respect of time and place, from those in which this prophecy is delivered. Be attentive to the solemn assurance now given, in the name of the Lord, for your instruction, as to the future fortunes of his church, and the disappointment and ruin of her enemies.*—*Gird yourselves.* Prepare for action, make ready for battle, put on your swords, and furnish yourselves with all the implements of war. I repeat the challenge, Gird yourselves. Though you again prepare for acts of hostility, and anew strengthen yourselves, however formidable your expeditions may appear, and likely to be crowned with success—*Ye shall be broken in pieces.* The Most High over all the earth again declares, all your efforts against Judah shall be vain; all your repeated attempts against that kingdom shall be fruitless: only you yourselves shall perish in the enterprise.

Take counsel together, as to ways and means by which you suppose you may most successfully invade and conquer the land of Judah.—*And it shall come to nought.* All your devices and plans of operation shall be frustrated. ‘Kings of the earth may set themselves, and rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and his people. But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. He shall speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his hot displeasure*.’—*Speak the word.* Declare your determined resolution of invading and desolating the land of Judah, and give orders to your powerful armies to carry your purposes into execution.—*And it shall not stand.* Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, if the Lord commandeth it not? There is no counsel or wisdom against the Lord. His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure; but your word and purpose shall not stand, for this good reason—*God is with us.* The promised Immanuel, to whose name the prophet alludes, and of which he gives the interpretation, God is with us, he shall be the defence of the house of his servant David, and deliver the kingdom of Judah out of your hands. God is with us in his temple, affording the symbols and proofs of his gracious presence; he is with us by his providence, granting us protection from powerful enemies; he is with us in his promises, assuring us of defence and safety. And if God be for us, who can be against us †? ‘He is clothed with strength wherewith he hath girded himself; and is mightier by far than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea ‡. Behold, all they that are incensed against thee, shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing ||.’ The God who is with us, is full of the most tender affection for his people, whom he keeps as the apple of

* Psa. ii. 2. *et seq.*
 || Isaiah xli. 11.

† Rom. viii. 31.

‡ Psa. xciii.

his eye: he considers the injuries done to them as done to himself; and in all the dispensations of his providence and grace, he discovers the highest regard to their best interests. In every age, and in every nation of the world, God, my brethren, is with his people, to strengthen and protect, to bless and save them. How animating and comfortable is this assurance to all good men, who wait for the salvation of the Lord!

II ¶ For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying.

Isaiah here declares in what manner God was pleased to communicate to him the instruction that he received.—He spake to the following effect, with a strong hand; with such irresistible energy, that he was not disturbed or distressed, but elevated, strengthened, and comforted. The prophet's mind at this time was probably in some measure enfeebled, in consequence of which he was ready to be dismayed by desponding fears; and the prospect of difficulties and dangers might have made him give way to the prevailing temper and practice of the times. God, therefore, who upholdeth them that fall, effectually supported, instructed, and enabled him to perform what he was commanded. By his strong hand, every impediment was removed out of the way of duty, all opposition was vanquished, and what was spoken carried home with divine power to his heart. The expression imports, that the Lord spake with such glorious evidence of the truth he delivered, and accompanied his instructions with such mighty energy, as rendered them effectual for the purposes for which they were intended.—There are principles of opposition to the dispensations and admonitions of God in the hearts even of good men, which require the strong hand of the Almighty to subdue them. Of this re-
mark

mark the prophet Jonas affords a remarkable instance. The apostle Paul loudly complains, that the flesh lusteth against the spirit; and this all the saints feel in their experience. Wrong apprehensions of the truths and ways of God, unsuccessfulness in his service, the influence of temptation, the entanglements of the world, the power of corruption, and a sense of guilt, conspire to render this method of instruction necessary. And such is the tender compassion of Jehovah, that, in order to the profiting of his servants, by his strong hand, he casts down every lofty imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and at once affords effectual deliverance, conviction, and assistance.

And instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people. The people of Judah, described at the sixth verse of this chapter, who had become weary of the government, the laws, and religion, which God had established among them, and were attached to foreign princes, alliances, and customs, are doubtless here intended. The prophet is cautioned not to walk in their ways. This prohibition is not to be understood in the literal, but in the figurative sense. He was not dissuaded from travelling in the ways by which they journeyed from one place to another, but from following their example, and deliberately proceeding, by a constant progressive motion, in imitating their temper, conversation, and conduct. He was cautiously to avoid conformity to them in their bad dispositions, and sinful practices. In this sense, some of the kings of Judah are said to have walked in the way of David and Solomon *. This instruction was intended to preserve our prophet from going into the evil courses, upon which his countrymen had entered at this period, who were overwhelmed with timidity, despondency, and distrust in God. He is divinely taught not to entertain the sentiments and opinions

* 2 Chron. xi. 17.

they had formed at this crisis of affairs, not to speak and act in the same foolish manner that they did, under the corrupt influence of unbelief and slavish fear.—My brethren, if this lesson was necessary to Isaiah, it is surely no less needful to us. Permit me, therefore, to address this advice to you, with the greatest earnestness and affection, ‘Walk not in the way of this people.’ Turn not from the holy commandment delivered unto you. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil. Turn not to the right hand: pretend not to do more than God hath commanded; and aim not to be righteous overmuch. Turn not to the left hand: rest not satisfied with your own imperfect performances, which come far short of the duty which God hath prescribed. Make not void the law of the Lord, either by doing that which it hath forbidden, or by leaving undone that which it requires. ‘Such as turn aside to crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity *; but whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved †.’

12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all *them* to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.

This verse contains another article of the instruction which our prophet received from God, in which he, and his other servants, are cautioned against complying with the prevailing iniquity of the times.—The people of Judah, on hearing of the strong combination formed against them by Syria and Ephraim, were greatly alarmed; and, filled with despondency, they exclaimed, A confederacy, a confederacy, which shall prove the means of our ruin. Instead of imploring the gracious interposition of God in their be-

* Psa. cxxv. 5.

† Prov. xxviii. 18.

half, they called in the help of Assyria; and formed a very improper connection with that people, who helped them not. The prophet, and those who feared the Lord, are here dissuaded from approving this plan of operation, which, in the issue, would prove exceedingly hurtful to the kingdom of Judah. They are strictly prohibited from joining the bulk of the nation, and acting under the influence of that culpable timidity by which they were distressed. They are required to distinguish themselves from the people in general, by more excellent principles and practices than those which were prevalent among the multitude. Particularly they were directed;

Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Those distressing objects which filled the many with consternation, and overwhelmed them with dread, should not discompose or intimidate the godly: on the contrary, they ought to contemplate them with serenity, destitute of those distracting fears which compelled a profane prince, and wicked people, to seek help any where rather than in God. The fear against which the caution is here given, may signify either the object of which they were afraid, namely, the powerful league formed against the Jewish people by their confederate enemies, or that kind of fear and perplexity with which the ungodly were much disturbed. Or the words may be considered as including both senses: fear not what your enemies have done, or can do; nor fear with dismaying, anxious timidity, as do the wicked and unbelieving among whom you live. The natural passion of fear, though in itself not sinful, yet, in depraved creatures, is mixed with sin, and becomes irregular in its actings, either missing the proper object on which it ought to terminate, or operating in a wrong way, or forbidden measure; either directed into a wrong channel, or else overflowing its banks. Indeed the other affections of love, hatred, and joy, are likewise often excited by improper objects; and when people are violently agitated

tated by them; their tranquillity of mind is unhappily disturbed, and they are either distressed with anxious uneasiness, or lulled asleep in carnal security.— Would you comply with this salutary advice? Get the internal causes of this distressing fear removed, and its disagreeable effects shall certainly cease. Use the sovereign remedy which a merciful God hath prescribed in the following verse, for curing this grievous malady; which never fails to prove effectual, through his divine blessing, for dispelling uneasy disquietudes, and restoring a settled serenity to the mind.

13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

These words point out an effectual remedy for preventing and allaying those dismaying fears, which our prophet, with all the godly, are cautioned carefully to avoid.—The word *sanctify* is used in various senses in scripture, with which you ought to be acquainted, that you may understand this and other passages where it occurs. It signifies, to consecrate, or set apart, from a common to a sacred purpose*; to purify, or make holy †. Sometimes it is ascribed to men, who, withdrawing from their common employments, devote themselves to the solemn worship and service of God ‡. At other times it is attributed to Jehovah, who sanctifies himself, when he displays the consummate rectitude of his nature, and perfect detestation of sin, in the dispensations of his providence, and in his word of truth §; and who sanctifies men, when he conveys holy principles into their hearts, from the proper improvement of which proceeds that holiness in life, and all manner of conversation, whereby his people are happily distinguished §. Men are said to sanctify God, when they venerate his glorious majesty,

* Joshua iii. 5.

† John xvii. 17.

‡ Exod. xix. 10.

§ Ezek. xxxviii. 23.

§ 1 Thess. v. 23.

extol his divine perfections, celebrate his infinite purity, and, trusting in his word, walk in his ordinances and commandments. In this important exercise, they entertain just and elevated apprehensions of his grandeur and grace, his power and faithfulness; and, fixing their dependence upon his omnipotence, they are raised far above confidence in human aid. Contemplating him in the magnificent character of the Lord of hosts, who hath all the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of this earth, to execute his pleasure, they are convinced, that he, and he alone, is to be feared; and that they have no just reason to be intimidated by the number and power of their enemies. Deeply sensible that none can deliver out of his hand, and that without him none can either help or hurt them; that he can never want instruments sufficient to baffle the projects, and defeat the conspiracies formed against them; they commit themselves, and all their interests, into the hands of their great Creator.—Thus, my friends, ought we to sanctify the Lord of hosts, not only in our words and actions, but in our hearts, as the apostle Peter teaches us, in Chap. iii. 15. of his First Epistle. He sanctifieth his people in soul and body, rendering their hearts, their language, and their lives holy; and, in return, we ought to sanctify God, both with our outward and inner man. He clearly sees through every appearance and disguise into the heart, which he attentively observes, and principally regards. If he is suitably respected and entertained, and the heart is possessed of reverence and love, he graciously approves; if not, all the acts of external homage are only vain oblation, which he will not accept. If this remedy reaches not to the heart, the disease will remain which it is intended to remove, and dismaying fears will continue to perplex and harass the mind.

And let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. The person who ought to be feared, is the Lord of hosts, Immanuel, God with us; concerning whom it

is foretold in the following verse, ‘ That he shall be for a sanctuary ; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel.’ Let this mighty Lord, who is your Father, your Saviour, your King, and your God, in whom are united the most glorious majesty, and the most amiable condescension and grace—let him be the chief object of your fear and dread. The fear of God here recommended, doth not consist in terrifying apprehensions of God as an enemy, but in composed reverence and awe of that almighty Parent, whose favour is worthy of the highest esteem, and whose displeasure ought carefully to be avoided as worse than death. It is a reverential awe of God, excited and preserved by proper views of his goodness, as well as of his greatness. This gracious disposition effectually dispels every other kind of uneasy fear, and leaves no room for them in the heart. It composes the soul amidst every disquietude : it restores to it the most desirable tranquillity and stability, and forms a powerful bulwark against the approach of evil. What time, said David, I am afraid, I will trust in thee, O Lord, who art my defence, and my rock *. Had he rashly resolved to seek for safety in the number, power, and fidelity of his friends and armies, or in any other advantage he enjoyed, his distracting fears would still have distressed him ; whereas the fear of the Lord, accompanied with a firm trust in his wisdom, power, and love, is the best antidote against, and surest relief from every perplexing anxiety.—‘ Let not thine heart envy sinners : but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is a reward, and thine expectation shall not be cut off †.’

14 And he shall be for a sanctuary ; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin, and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

* Psal. lxxii. 5, 6.

† Prov. xxiii. 17, 18.

The benefit to be enjoyed by those who sanctify the Lord of hosts, is here contrasted with the dangerous condition of those who reject and contemn him.— To such as sanctify and fear the Lord of hosts, he shall be for a sanctuary; which is a place set apart for the defence of those who resort to it for safety in the time of danger. They shall participate of all those important benefits which people enjoy who repair to a sanctuary. By the interposition of his kind providence, the Lord will protect them from the various evils to which they are exposed; and they shall find agreeable safety from every enemy, however subtle and strong. Both soul and body comes into his gracious protection, who is their keeper, and a shade upon their right hand, as it is written in P^sal. cxxi.: ‘The Lord shall preserve thee from all
 ‘evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall
 ‘preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from
 ‘this time forth and even for evermore.’ The body, with all its interests, comes under his defence; who hath said, that ‘he keepeth all his servants bones; ‘not one of them is broken *;’ who keeps them as in a pavilion from the strife of tongues †; and sets a hedge on every side about their houses, and all that they have. The soul, with all its concerns, enjoys in God the most desirable covert; who, by most undubitable signs, demonstrates his gracious presence with his people, and solicitous regard for their welfare and safety, by forgiving their sins, illuminating their minds, admitting them to communion with him, comforting their hearts, assisting them in duty, and accepting of their persons and services. In this sanctuary, they always find the plentiful supply of all manner of necessary provision, and the most delightful rest and repose amidst all the evils and dangers with which they are surrounded. It is not indeed the object of sense; nor can we fully explain in what

* P^sal. xxxiv. 20.† P^sal. xxxi. 20.

manner those who seem to be equally exposed to dangers with other men, are distinguished by the power, the grace, and special care of the providence of God. Though the defence is invisible, it is certain that he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*. This is indeed a most extensive privilege, comprehending every thing necessary to real felicity, and everlasting consolation.—Instead of shewing you, that this assurance hath been verified in ten thousand instances, I rather request you to take sanctuary in Immanuel, the Lord of hosts; and then you need not be afraid of any calamity: there is not any thing that shall really hurt you: your best interests shall be safe, and your hopes shall never be disappointed.

But for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel. Immanuel, God with us, who is the chief subject of the ancient predictions and promises which were announced by the prophets, who, in the preceding verse, is called the Lord of hosts, is doubtless the person here intended. The words before us are highly figurative, and multiplied, to point out the certainty and greatness of the calamity which should befall the fearful and unbelieving. The expressions are of similar import, though the latter is stronger and more forcible than the former. The first, in which the person spoken of is said to be for a stone of stumbling, plainly intimates, that though men were to be offended at him, and displeased with him, he was firm and permanent; one that could not easily be broken, or torn asunder; and proper to be laid into the foundation of a great building. The last, in which he is foretold to be a rock of offence, denotes the wonderful immutability of his nature, the everlasting perpetuity of his duration, and his perfect sufficiency to afford defence to those who betake themselves to him for refuge, notwithstanding

* Psal. xci. 1.

ing he was injured and offended by multitudes. These qualifications are often mentioned in the prophetic writings as attributes of the Messiah, who is represented as possessing these and similar properties. He is the foundation-stone which God hath laid in Zion, upon which he builds his church; the rock of salvation, by which all the elect of God are protected from the many hazards to which they are exposed.—To those of an opposite character, he is a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence, as the prophet declares, and the New Testament abundantly testifies. Some of both the houses of Israel stumbled at the meanness of his birth, and the poverty of his condition; others were offended at the obscurity of his person, and his despicable appearance in the world. Some stumbled at the company with which he associated; others were offended at the audience with which he was attended. Some stumbled at the high pretensions which he assumed, the doctrine that he taught, or the condescension that he displayed; whilst others were offended at the miracles he performed, at the sufferings he sustained, and the ignominious, painful death to which he submitted. Thus it proved to many of both the houses of Israel. At the time this prophecy was delivered, the posterity of the patriarch Jacob was divided into two distinct nations, well known by the names of Judah and Ephraim: but after their return from captivity, according to the prediction delivered by the prophet Ezekiel *, they were united into one people: and in this state they continued, when the great Messiah appeared among them.—Let us beware of stumbling at Jesus Christ, and of being offended with him, like the Jews of old. Let us estimate his character by the unerring standard of the scriptures: and, grateful for his benevolent interposition in our favour, let us repair to him, the rock of salvation, and then shall we be for ever safe.

* Ezek. xxxvii. 19.

For a gin, and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You all know, I suppose, that a gin or snare are terms of similar import, used to signify any trap that is intended to entangle, through ignorance or inattention, those for whom it was set. Here our prophet foretels, that Immanuel, whom he calls in the preceding verse the Lord of hosts, would prove for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, by whom they were to be reduced to those straits, and perplexing difficulties, from which they should be unable to extricate themselves. They expected the Messiah to appear with external pomp and magnificence; whereas the Son of God dwelt among them in a mean and humble condition. They rashly pronounced him an impostor, and a false prophet; whilst, in fact, he was the truth, and his doctrine heavenly and divine. They calumniated him as possessed with a devil, and an evil-doer, though he uniformly maintained the most untainted purity of conduct, and performed, in their presence, those stupendous miracles which no man could do unless God was with him. They supposed that by putting to death Jesus Christ, they would have enjoyed the favour of the Romans, and their state would have been preserved in security; whereas, according to the counsel of Jehovah, their putting him to death, was the cause of the destruction of their nation, city, and temple, by that very people whose friendship they meant thereby to conciliate. When the Son of God affirmed in his discourses, that ‘ he and the Father are one;’ that ‘ the Father is in him, and he in the Father *;’ that ‘ he was the Lord of the Sabbath †;’ that ‘ he had power on earth to forgive sins ‡;’ that ‘ he is the bread of life; and unless we eat his flesh, and drink his blood,’ &c. ||; they foolishly imagined, that these, and the like declarations, were sufficient reasons why they should reject him as a blasphemer. In this manner they were deceived: they

* John x. 30. 38.

† Matth. xii. 8,

‡ Matth. ix. 6.

|| John vi. 48. &c.

erred in judgment and practice, and subjected themselves to the most terrible judgments. Many in Jerusalem were reduced to the most distressing circumstances, and suffered the most dreadful calamities, from which they could not extricate themselves. The cause, however, of the divine judgments in which they were involved, was not in Jesus Christ, at whom they were offended; but in themselves, who, without just reason, were displeased with him.—Thus was fulfilled the prediction before us, and thus were verified the words of good old Simeon, recorded Luke ii. 34, 35. which he spake unto Mary, the mother of our Saviour: ‘Behold, this (difficulted by what name to call this illustrious child) is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.’—As it was of old, so it is now, and shall be in following ages of the church: ‘Unto you that believe, he is precious: but unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, to them who stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed*.’

15 And many among them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

The effects that should follow the accomplishment of the foregoing prediction, are here particularly mentioned and illustrated.—Of both the houses of Israel and Judah, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, there were some who participated in the great salvation of the Lord, to whom he was for a sanctuary. Of them also there were many, a great number, who stumbled, and were offended at him; and were, therefore, excluded from the blessings of his redemption.

* 1 Peter ii. 7, 8.

With wicked hands, having slain the Prince of life, and killed the Lord of glory, many of them, through blind infidelity, and perverse obstinacy, fell under the most awful miseries. They were deprived of their civil and religious privileges, the gospel was taken from them, the covenant between God and them was dissolved, their city and temple was destroyed, wrath came upon them to the uttermost, and some of them fell into everlasting perdition.—*And be broken.* Their nation and church was broken to pieces, in such a manner that they could not recover their former unity and grandeur, whilst great numbers of individuals were broken and ruined by misfortunes of various kinds.—*And be snared.* By their foolish reasonings, and vain delusions, they were brought into a perplexing, dangerous condition, in which they could not reconcile the events of providence to the opinions they had formed concerning the promised Messiah; and thus, through ignorance and prejudice, they were taken as in a snare.—It is added, *And be taken.* As birds are caught in the net that is spread for them, and fishes are inclosed in the net that is let down for them into the water, so the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be insnared by their own wicked devices, and to become a prey to their enemies. God, in his infinite wisdom, so over-rules the opinions, the reasonings, and actions of wicked men, that, whilst they think they are escaping danger, fear, and trouble, they find, in experience, that they were egregiously mistaken, and that they were working their own misery and destruction. As Solomon observes in the Proverbs, ‘ In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare *,’ in which his neighbour is sometimes caught, and in which he himself is always taken.—Reviewing this part of prophecy, the words of Jesus Christ, which are written Matthew xi. 6. ought to make deep impression upon

* Prov. xxix. 6.

our hearts: ‘Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.’ Be not offended at the person or conduct of the Son of God, at the doctrines or duties he inculcated, at the sufferings to which he foretold his disciples should be exposed, and you shall experience the truth of this beatitude; you shall enjoy peace and safety, when others are broken and snared; you shall be blessed with consolation and joy in this world, and in the world to come with everlasting life.—From this subject I might easily lead you into an unfathomable depth, which it is much more safe to contemplate, and retire to treat of other matters, than to enter far into it, and lose ourselves. This, however, we affirm, that the destruction of men is always the fruit of their own doings; and that those who presumptuously reject Immanuel, shall certainly fall into the condemnation here mentioned. Though this wonderful Person came into the world not to destroy, but to save; though his primary and proper design was, to lay a sure foundation on which men should build all their hopes; yet if people will stumble, and be offended at him, they shall be broken and snared. Rejection of the Saviour effectually excludes from his salvation, and converts the very means of deliverance into means of destruction. This was the misery of many in Israel; and this is the condemnation of many among us, who either make light of the gospel, and account it foolishness, or endeavour to pervert it to the worst of purposes. Take heed then, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.

The prophet, in the name of Jehovah, who gave him commandment what he should say, addresses Immanuel, calling him to perform his peculiar work toward his disciples, to whom he should
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be for a sanctuary.—The person introduced as speaking by Isaiah, and the person to whom the words of this verse are directed, are the same that are mentioned in Pſal. cx. 1. where the royal poet declares, ‘The Lord ſaid unto my Lord,’ &c. The testimony, and the law, here intended, are the word of God, containing the doctrine and precepts delivered concerning the promised Messiah, and those which were published by him and his apostles. These sacred truths, and most just commandments, are sometimes called a testimony, in the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament*. With great propriety do they bear this designation, as they testify the will of God, and the duty of man; as they bear witness of Jesus Christ, and reveal the gracious designs of God for the salvation of sinners. The word translated *testimony*, is derived from one that signifies *to witness*; and is applied to the record of God, which is solemnly attested by the most proper and competent witnesses. The law which it contains, was promulgated amidst the ministry of angels, in the presence of the whole camp of Israel, and accompanied with the most astonishing wonders, and awful signs from heaven. The gospel which it publishes, was preached by the Lord, and his inspired apostles, God bearing them witness with signs, and wonders, and miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost: it was confirmed by the death, resurrection, and subsequent glory of Jesus Christ, which the world was required to consider as evidences of the truth of their testimony.—The law sometimes denotes, in a limited sense, the moral law of God, comprised in the ten commandments; or the Jewish dispensation, instituted by their great Legislator. In this sense the apostle John affirms, that ‘the law was given by Moses †.’ At other times, it signifies the whole word of God revealed in the scriptures, which instructs mankind in the knowledge

* Pſal. xix. 7. 2 Theſſ. i. 10.

† John i. 17.

of their duty, and points out the manifold obligations we lie under to perform it with fidelity and diligence. In this extensive meaning, we suppose, the following assertion is to be understood: ‘The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*.’ This last signification of the law seems best adapted to the passage before us, where the whole revealed mind and will of God is intended, of which the law is an excellent summary, as well as the perfect rule of that obedience which is required of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

This testimony the Messiah is required to bind up: this law he is directed to seal among his disciples. A learned commentator well observes, that the Hebrew word translated *bind up*, signifies also *to inscribe* and *engrave*, which, in this verse, seems to be the preferable interpretation. By this translation, both the expressions under consideration are of similar import: a just and elegant exposition of the words is suggested, which, according to this view of them, relate to the inscription of the testimony and law of God on the hearts of his disciples. Of this testimony the apostle John gives a short abridgment, in these few words: ‘God sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world †.’ When the testimony is inscribed or confirmed by the internal operation of the Holy Ghost, the evidences of its glorious truth are deeply impressed upon the mind, and examined with the utmost attention and care. The witness of Moses is compared with that given by the other prophets; the testimony of the Father and the Son, with that of Moses, and the prophets; and with all these is united the evidence delivered by the apostles of Jesus Christ. The combined force of all these evidences, which perfectly agree among themselves, is clearly perceived; conviction of the truth is carried to the heart: in consequence of which, the record of God is received by the disciple, who thus sets to his

* Psal. xix. 7.

† 1 John iv. 14.

seal that God is true; and, in this manner, as the apostle Paul speaks, ‘It is confirmed in him *.’—The Messiah is likewise directed to seal among his disciples that law, of which love is the abridgment and fulfilment. Seals, you know, are used for different purposes. Sometimes, to authenticate a deed, or confirm a transaction of high importance: thus the letters written in king Ahafuerus’ name, by Mordecai, were sealed with the king’s ring or seal †. At other times, things are sealed, to shew whose workmanship they are, or to whom they belong; and, in this sense, probably, the apostle Paul observes, that after men believe, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise ‡. Sometimes, to conceal things from public view: with this design, letters are sealed to prevent people from inspecting their contents. At other times, to preserve them in safety from the hand of violence or fraud: the word is to be thus understood, where God informed the people of Israel, that the sins they committed were laid up in store with him, and sealed up among his treasures ||. I see no reason for restricting the expression here to any one of these senses, and therefore I consider it as including all of them. Seal the law among my disciples: by this inward operation upon their hearts, afford them the witness in themselves of the truth of the divine testimony; give them evidence that they are God’s workmanship, created unto good works; furnish them with those excellent principles and rules of action with which other people are unacquainted; and preserve them safe in the exercise of cheerful obedience to the commands of God. Such, my brethren, if I mistake not, is the import of what is contained in this verse.—Let us who profess to be the disciples of Jesus Christ, convert this direction into earnest prayer to God, and request of him the inestimable blessings here men-

* 1 Cor. i. 6.

† Esther viii. 10.

‡ Eph. i. 13.

|| Deut. xxxiii. 34.

tioned, as the fulfilment of his promise, and the rich display of his marvellous grace, that henceforth we may transcribe his law into our lives, so as it may be known and read of all men.

17 And I will wait upon the LORD that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.

The illustrious Person, to whom God, by the prophet, had addressed the words of the foregoing verse, is here introduced, acquiescing in the appointment and command of God, and waiting, with his disciples, for the accomplishment of his promises.—Some interpreters are of opinion, that what is contained in this and the following verse, are properly the words of our prophet, though partly applied to Jesus Christ, in way of accommodation, by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Others have asserted, that what is said in this verse, is to be attributed to Isaiah; and that which follows, in the 18th verse, is to be ascribed to the Messiah. A third class, supposing that these expositions are rather strained, consider both verses as the words of the Son of God, to whom the latter verse is expressly applied *, and to whom what is here spoken is equally applicable. Whichsoever of these sentiments you are pleased to adopt, the import of the resolution, now to be explained, is nearly the same: *I will wait upon the Lord.* In the practice of this becoming resolution, Jehovah is the object of intense desire, of diligent attention, earnest expectation, and constant dependence. In this important exercise, humility and hope, patience and perseverance, are happily combined with an agreeable serenity of mind, which stands in direct opposition to turbulence of spirit, and uneasy emotions of soul. It checks every opposite passion, and preserves the mind in a pleasing

* Heb. ii. 13.

tranquillity, satisfied with the sovereign good pleasure of God, and attentive to the diligent improvement of all the means appointed for attaining the end in view. In every change, affliction, and trial, it disposes wholly to rely upon God, for all the blessings he hath promised to bestow, in the season he sees most proper to confer them. Hence, in the last clause of this verse, the same resolution is thus expressed: *I will look for him.* This is at once a very pleasant and profitable employment; and, therefore, the writer of the book of Lamentations affirms, that ‘it is good to hope, and quietly to wait for the salvation of the Lord*.’ To this important duty the royal psalmist frequently encourages himself and others: ‘My soul,’ saith he, ‘wait thou only upon him: for my expectation is from him †.’ And elsewhere, ‘I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning ‡.’ This was the employment not only of David, but of David’s Lord, of Isaiah, and all the holy men of God that ever lived upon the earth.—‘Wait then on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart: wait, I say, upon the Lord.’ Rouse yourselves to activity, diligence, and perseverance, in this good work of the Lord: lay aside your timidity and indolence, and every other incumbrance, and devote yourselves to this becoming exercise. Constantly depend upon God, for all the mercy and grace that your various circumstances may require; and look to him daily for the accomplishment of your just desires, assured that it is not a vain thing to wait upon him, who waits to be gracious.

That hideth his face from the house of Jacob. This character is repeatedly ascribed to Jehovah in this prophecy ||. Though, by the immensity of his divine

* Lam. iii. 6.

† Psal. lxii. 5.

‡ Psal. cxxx. 5, 6.

|| See Isaiah xlv. 15.

nature, God is every where present, such is the spirituality of his nature, that he cannot be seen by mortal eyes; and being invisible, he may be said to hide himself from human view. The character, however, before us, is especially attributed to him, on account of his withdrawing from his servants the sensible manifestations of his gracious presence, so that they perceive not the proofs of his providential care and loving-kindness, with which they were formerly favoured. For wise and salutary purposes, he conceals from them the reasons and ends of the various dispensations of his providence and grace: he allows the agreeable correspondence that he formerly maintained with them to be interrupted for a season, and restrains from them the light of his countenance, and the pledges of his love, which constitute the felicity and joy of the upright among men. In these and other similar respects, God hideth himself from the house of Jacob: by which may be meant the natural posterity of that great patriarch, comprehending both the houses of Israel, of whom the church of God was composed under the Old Testament; and who afforded a lively representation of the church of Jesus Christ under the New Testament, which often bears this name in prophetic language. Both of these societies may be included in the expression, as each of them have their share in this dispensation.—Though this subject is not rightly understood by those who are not experimentally acquainted with the power of godliness, yet the truth it contains is not on that account a whit the less real and certain. Strangers to the happiness resulting from the manifestations of the peculiar favour of the Lord, and incapable of relishing those enjoyments, are ready to call in question the reality of this matter, and to stigmatize it with the names of enthusiasm and fanaticism. Such conduct, which always proceeds from ignorance or prejudice, no more injures the truth here asserted, than the contempt of music, which some foolish people discover, who have no ear,
and

and are insensible to its charms, can detract from the excellence of that much-admired art.—Truly, O Lord, thou art a God that hidest thyself. Thy professing people, by their sins, frequently provoke thee to withdraw from them thy gracious presence; and when thou hidest thyself, who can behold thee? whether it be done against a nation, or a person only. This mournful truth is confirmed by the concurring testimony of the faithful in every generation; and perhaps, in few ages hath this character of Jehovah been more fully verified than in the present. Let us then try to discover the causes of this affecting dispensation, and diligently endeavour to have them removed, whilst, in the mean time, we study to comply with the gracious designs that God may have in view to promote, by acting toward us in this manner.

18 Behold I and the children whom the LORD hath given me *are* for signs, and for wonders in Israel; from the LORD of hosts, who dwelleth in mount Zion.

The first part of this verse being expressly applied to Jesus Christ, by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, I shall consider the words as proceeding from the Messiah, who is introduced, exhibiting himself, and his disciples, as the objects of admiring contemplation.—In obedience to this call, turn your attention from every other object, elevate your thoughts, awaken all the powers of your souls, steadily to contemplate, with wonder, love, and gratitude, the illustrious Person, who justly claims your most intense meditation. Behold him, with veneration and reverence, to whom God hath given a name above every name. Behold him, with penitence and contrition of heart, who was pierced for your iniquities. Behold him, with thankfulness and praise, who redeemed you to God by his own blood. Behold him, with affection and hope, who will stablish your hearts
unblame-

unblameable in holiness, before God, at his coming. Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Ye covetous, avaricious sons of men, behold Immanuel, with boundless liberality, debasing himself, and becoming poor, that he might make many rich. Ye proud and ambitious, behold the Son of God humbling himself, and becoming obedient to the death of the cross, that he might hide pride from our eyes, and exalt the lowly to the most distinguished honours. Ye sensual and voluptuous, behold Jesus Christ covered with stripes, bruises, and blood, sustaining, with invincible patience and magnanimity, the most complicated sufferings, that he might atone for your sensuality, and love of sinful pleasure. Ye penitent and faithful, turn your eyes from your iniquities, with which you are afflicted, and direct them to the Lamb of God, who presented himself an expiatory sacrifice for your sins. Contemplate this glorious Person, going about continually doing good; with unremitting activity, instructing and healing the people; and setting you an example, that ye might follow his steps. Reflect on his ignominious crown of thorns, by which he acquired for you a never-fading crown of glory: and survey his wonderful condescension, in wearing, as an object of ridicule, a purple robe, by which he obtained for you the robe of righteousness, and garment of salvation. Consider, with tender sympathy, his wounds and stripes, as the precious remedy by which your spiritual diseases must be healed; and his agonizing death, to which he submitted, to deliver you from death, and to raise you to immortal life. And then extend your view to that happy day, when he will present you all glorious, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy.— No sight so instructive, and so useful to the faithful, as the blessed Redeemer, bearing our sins, and accomplishing our salvation. Though to vain deluded men, this is an object of disgust and horror,
those

those who are sensible of their sin and danger, and have their eyes illuminated, are healed by the prospect, as the diseased Israelites who looked upon the brazen serpent: their whole hearts are mollified, changed, and comforted.

And the children whom the Lord hath given me. The disciples of the Messiah, on whom the law of God is sealed, are doubtless the children whom Jehovah hath given him. The description is emphatic, just, and instructive, highly worthy of our serious attention. They are the children of Immanuel, who, in the following chapter, is called the everlasting Father; and, in the fifty-third chapter of this prophecy, they are spoken of as his seed and posterity. They are begotten again by the incorruptible seed of his word; they are born from above, of his spirit; they bear his most amiable image; they are adopted into his divine family; they are the objects of his tender affection, and paternal care; they enjoy his fatherly protection; they are nourished and supported by his provisions; they are instructed by him, so as to become wise unto salvation; they are admitted into his fellowship, and constituted heirs of his eternal kingdom. On these and similar accounts, the disciples of Immanuel are, with great propriety, called his children, whom the Lord hath given him.—I pretend not to explain the transaction mentioned in this last clause, which ought rather to be considered with admiration and gratitude, than investigated with culpable curiosity, and critical nicety. It is frequently alluded to in scripture, particularly in the seventeenth chapter of John, where our blessed Saviour, in his intercessory prayer, several times repeats this expression: ‘Thine they were (saith he to his heavenly Father), and thou gavest them me;’ and again, ‘Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory*.’ All

* John xvi. 6. 24.

things are of God, who gives children unto men according to his good pleasure. He hath given his Son Jesus Christ unto the world, as a glorious demonstration of his love, and the unspeakable gift of his grace. He hath given to Jesus Christ men out of the world, as the important charge with which he is intrusted, that he might redeem them from all evil by his precious blood, that he may govern them as the subjects of his kingdom, that he may instruct them as disciples in his school, that he may constitute them members of his family and heirs of his glory, whilst he looks upon them as the rich rewards of his obedience even unto death. With this divine gift, the great Messiah is here introduced as highly well pleased, and triumphing in the view of the glorious retinue with which he shall be attended.—Would you, my brethren, participate in the blessed privilege of being presented at last among the children of Jesus Christ, and entertain upon good grounds this desirable prospect? The solemn deed here mentioned, must be ratified by your consent. Impressed with a deep sense of your danger, solicitously concerned for your salvation, and firmly persuaded of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ, you must commit yourselves to him, who is able to keep you against that day; and repose your confidence upon his omnipotent arm, that he may preserve you to his heavenly kingdom. Besought by the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him, which is your reasonable service. The unreserved surrender of yourselves to the Lord, to be wholly at his disposal, and to act entirely for his honour, will make good his grant of you to Jesus Christ. Though this sacrifice is your solemn deed, yet, properly speaking, it is the gift of God, who furnishes not only the sacrifice, but the altar, and sends down fire to enliven it from heaven.

Are for signs and wonders in Israel. Signs are some uncommon appearances, which excite attention and

and surprife, that cannot be accounted for by the laws of nature; and, therefore, remind the fpectators of the power and prefence of God. Of this fort were the figns performed by Mofes, in the prefence of Pharaoh. A wonder is fome extraordinary phenomenon, that exceeds the expectations of thofe who behold it: fuch was bringing water from the rock, by Mofes; and the raifing of the dead, by Jefus Chrift. The words are often promifcuoufly ufed; and when joined, as in this verfe, the latter feems intended to explain and illuftrate the former; and both are defigned to foretel, that the Mefiah, and his followers, were to be exceedingly remarkable on account of fome peculiar, furprifing circumftances with which they were to be attended.—Jefus Chrift is indeed altogether a moft fingular and wonderful Perfon, in whom is united not a corruptible and immortal nature, as in mankind, but the divine and human nature, which gives him infinitely the pre-eminence of all the fons of men. The circumftances which accompanied his nativity, the vifible defcent of the Holy Ghoft upon him at baptifm, the public teftimonies he received from heaven to his divine miffion and authority, the miraculous works that he performed, the fublimity and efficacy of his doctrine, the complicated, unparalleled fufferings he fufained, the ignominious and accursed death by which he made atonement for our fins, his triumphant refurrektion from the dead, and glorious afcenfion into heaven, with their aftonifhing effects, exhibit to view the moft ftupendous wonders that ever were contemplated. You cannot be furprifed that thofe who beheld thefe marvellous things were obliged to exclaim—Who is this?—Surely this was the fon of God.—It was never fo feen in Ifrael.

With the Mefiah are here joined his children, who, like him, are alfo for figns and wonders. Though, in themfelves, plain, illiterate men, remarkable neither for natural or acquired endowments, neither for high rank or diftinguifhed reputation, they were pitched
upon

upon by their great Lord, to be his adopted, renewed children: they were invested in the most honourable character, elevated to the most eminent station, possessed of the most excellent spirit, furnished with the most noble powers, enabled to perform the most wonderful works, and to execute the greatest designs. Notwithstanding, they were made a spectacle unto the world: they were made a gazing stock, by reproaches and afflictions: they were treated in the most contemptible manner, as the filth and offscouring of all things: they were despised, and esteemed fools, for Christ's sake. They were thought to be prodigies of wretchedness, and signs that were every where spoken against. The people of Israel, unable to resist the wisdom by which they spake, and the power by which they performed the most astonishing miracles, were all amazed and marvelled: they were filled with wonder, and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Such was the opinion formed of the first disciples of the Messiah, with which correspond the sentiments entertained concerning their followers, in succeeding ages, by those among whom they have lived. Though the excellent ones of the earth, distinguished by being blameless and harmless as the sons of God, yet, by a crooked and perverse generation, they have been charged with the most odious principles and practices: they have been misrepresented as dangerous persons, and treated as the vilest miscreants; and thus have been exhibited as signs and wonders. And at the final judgment, when they shall appear with their Lord in the highest honour and glory, they shall be viewed as signs and wonders of the Redeemer's power and grace.—All that appears marvellous in Jesus Christ, and his spiritual children, we are here taught to consider as proceeding

From the Lord of hosts, who dwelleth in mount Zion.
The description given in these words of Jehovah, is short and sublime: the Lord of hosts, who doth
whatsoever

whatsoever pleaseth him in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, whose peculiar residence is in mount Zion. Under the former dispensation, God is said to have dwelt in the literal Zion, which was therefore called his Holy hill; and in the earthly Jerusalem, honoured with the name of the City of the Lord. That highly favoured mountain was remarkable for its beautiful situation: it was the delight of the nations, the joy of the whole earth: on its summit was built the temple of the Lord, in which were the ark and glory of the Lord, and where the displays of his gracious presence were enjoyed by his people. In these and other respects, it afforded an instructive type of the Zion that is above, which, in a special manner, is the habitation of the Lord, wherein he richly manifests his presence and glory.—All things are of God, from whom originated the plan, and from whom proceeded the prediction, of what we are here called to contemplate. From his wise counsel and determined purpose, from his sovereign will and good pleasure, from his faithful word and promise, from his divine power and effectual operation, proceed the interesting scene presented to view in this verse, which I have illustrated at considerable length. If you have received spiritual advantage from the consideration of this passage, corresponding to the attention that you have now given me, neither my labour, nor your attendance, shall be in vain.—This subject reminds you who are the disciples of Jesus Christ, that you must lay your account with being considered as wonders and prodigies, even among those who profess to be the people of God. It is enough that the disciple be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. As Jesus Christ was, so ought you to be in the world, glorying in your conformity to him in his sufferings, as your distinguished honour and felicity. Viewing your resemblance to your gracious Redeemer, as proceeding from the divine love and appointment, you may rejoice in the
blessed

bleſſed proſpect of being acknowledged by him, in the preſence of an aſſembled world, as the children whom God hath given him. Let every one that hath this hope in him purify himſelf, even as he is pure, knowing that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him, for we ſhall ſee him as he is*.

19 ¶ And when they ſhall ſay unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar ſpirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: ſhould not a people ſeek unto their God? for the living, to the dead?

This and the following verſe, contains an exhortation deduced from the foregoing prediction, addreſſed to the Jews, and all thoſe who might be in ſimilar circumſtances with them, in which they are admoniſhed, as they would eſcape the juſt judgments of Heaven, to receive the inſtructions of their divine Teacher, and not to regard the divination and profane rites of the nations around them.—The perſons againſt whom the caution is given, are thoſe who have familiar ſpirits; who were intimately acquainted with ſome demon or evil ſpirit, with whom they pretended frequently to converſe, and to hold cloſe correſpondence: wizards, forcerers, or enchanters, who perform magical tricks, and uſe witchcraft, by the aſſiſtance of the powers of darkneſs. They are farther deſcribed, by their peeping and muttering, becauſe they commonly delivered anſwers to thoſe who conſulted them, with a ſhrill, ſqueaking voice, or with a low, hoarſe tone, which for certain purpoſes they aſſumed. Shewing reſpect to theſe people, and aſking their advice, was expreſſly prohibited in the law of the Lord; where it is thus written: ‘ Regard not them that have familiar ſpirits, * neither ſeek after wizards, to be deſiled by them:

* 1 John iii. 2, 3.

‘ I am

‘ I am the Lord *.’ And to deter all from this forbidden practice, this awful threatening is subjoined : ‘ The soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a-whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people †.’ Notwithstanding this strict charge, and denunciation of divine judgments, there were not a few in Israel and Judah, who not only discovered a strong propensity to depart from the law and testimony of God, into the most abominable superstition, but, by their example and influence, solicited others to join them in these wicked practices. A remarkable instance of this occurs in the history of Saul, the son of Kish ; who disguised himself, and went by night to a woman that had a familiar spirit at Endor ; and said, ‘ I pray thee divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me up whom I shall name unto thee ‡.’ To this foolish superstition many among the Jews were much addicted, in the reign of Manasseh ; concerning whom it is recorded, that ‘ he made his son to pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits, and wizards §.’ In the days of good king Josiah, all these abominations which were observed in the land of Judah, and in Jerusalem, that prince did put away, that he might perform the words of the law ¶. After all the care and pains that had been employed to extirpate this detestable practice, still it was revived ; of which a new proof occurs in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read of a certain damsel, possessed with a spirit of divination, who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying ¶.—The inhabitants of this country, in former times, are well known to have been greatly addicted to this foolish superstition ; and frequently to have consulted with those who were supposed to

* Lev. xix. 31.

† Lev. xx. 6.

‡ 1 Sam. xxviii. 8.

§ 2 Kings xxi. 6.

¶ 2 Kings xxiii. 24.

¶ Acts xvi. 16.

have familiar spirits, called Fortune-tellers, in order to acquire the knowledge of secret, future events, by invoking some demon, or ghosts of dead men, or by using some kind of conjuration. When at any time the disciples of Jesus are solicited or enticed to ask counsel or advice of such as use enchantments, and pretend to be endowed with supernatural power and knowledge, they ought with firmness to reject the temptation, and carefully avoid all such criminal conduct.

Should not a people seek unto their God? for the living, to the dead? To seek unto God, includes a heartfelt conviction that we have lost his favour, image, and fellowship, with all right to the everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory:—a firm persuasion that, through the tender mercies of the Most High, means are devised, and a way appointed, through the intervention of Immanuel, by which we may recover the unspeakable loss we have sustained:—a deep sense of our infinite need of being restored to the divine love, resemblance, communion, and enjoyment, and the possession of every other blessing connected with these inestimable prerogatives:—and a high esteem of God's supreme excellence, and adorable condescension, expressed in ardent desires of participating in all the blessings of his salvation, accompanied with the diligent use of the means instituted for our assistance, in thus seeking the Lord. In this manner a people should seek unto God, whose consummate goodness can relieve all their necessities, whose irresistible power can be their sure defence from all evil, and whose compassions are so great that he will not suffer them to lack any good thing. And they ought to seek him as their God, who hath assumed them to be his people; whom they have chosen to be their God, on whom they depend for protection, direction, and assistance, and to whose honour and service they are entirely devoted. Say, then, is not this employment
highly

highly becoming? and is not every practice inconsistent with it absurd and criminal?

For the living, to the dead. The expression is incomplete, and seems to require to be filled up in this manner: Why would ye inquire concerning the living at the dead? By whom may be meant the departed spirits of those illustrious heroes, who were supposed, after death, to be allied to the gods, to be well acquainted with human affairs, and the transactions of present and future times. In this sense the dead are sometimes mentioned in the books of Moses, as in the following remarkable statute: ‘There shall not be found among you one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an inchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a necromancer*.’ And in the solemn confession that was made by the children of Israel, over the first-fruits and tithes that they presented before the Lord, the person who brought them was appointed to acknowledge: ‘I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken thereof for any unclean use, nor given thereof for the dead †.’ Notwithstanding these necessary precautions to preserve the Israelites from this absurd practice, it is acknowledged, that ‘they did eat the sacrifices of the dead ‡.’ Nothing can be more foolish and inconsistent in a people, who ought to seek unto their God in all their perplexities and distresses, than to forsake him, and inquire concerning their present circumstances, or future fortunes, at the dead, who have gone from this world, and are unable to give either counsel or deliverance;—to prefer the speculations and traditions of those who are dead in trespasses and sins, to the word and counsels of the living God, as did the Pharisees.—Abhorring such wicked practices, do you seek unto your God, with importunity and diligence, for direction, assistance, and every blessing that

* Deut. xviii. 10, 11. † Deut. xxvi. 14. ‡ Psal. cvi. 28.

you need, animated by the comfortable assurance, that if you truly seek the Lord, you shall not lack any good thing: you shall not want suitable provision, continual protection, seasonable deliverance, divine conduct, and necessary support.

20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.

These words point to an unerring standard, by which all pretensions to truth and holiness ought to be carefully examined.—By the law, is here meant the perfect law of God, stamped with the supreme authority of the one great Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy, containing a full and explicit declaration of his blessed will, which is the infallible rule to which the temper and conduct of men ought to be conformed. By this law is the knowledge of sin: it discovers every counterfeit grace, every deviation from duty, and that pretended holiness by which the many are apt to be deluded. It teacheth what the Lord God requireth, and points out that acceptable obedience, which lies at an equal distance from superstition on the one hand, and formality on the other.—By the testimony, is intended the doctrines and promises that God hath revealed in his blessed word, wherein he hath declared in what manner the transgressors of his law may obtain the pardon of sin, the sanctification of their persons, and eternal life. He hath not left those to whom he hath committed his lively oracles at uncertainty, with respect to these important subjects; but hath clearly made known the way of salvation, and marked out the path of life. If the testimony of men, who are fallible, is credited; if by two or three witnesses every thing is established; then, certainly, the testimony of God, who is infinitely greater than man, which comes attested by witnesses in heaven and earth,

earth, ought to be firmly believed, and faithfully improved, To this law and testimony the people of God must have continual recourse; and, by this perfect standard, examine every doctrine, principle, and practice. Every other test beside this is insufficient. If we have recourse to the laws of men, they are fluctuating and variable; they reach not to the heart; they cannot convert the soul, or form the temper and sentiments of which we ought to be possessed. If we are influenced and guided by custom and example, we shall enter into the broad way that leadeth to destruction, and follow a multitude to do evil. If we estimate objects, and pursue them, according to the dictates of our own corrupt minds, we will act most inconsistently; we will join the ungodly, who speak against the truth, and walk after their own lusts. If we expect any extraordinary, new revelation, or act under the influence of impressions that are not agreeable to scripture, we may become visionaries and enthusiasts of the worst kind.—To the law and to the testimony of the Lord, which is sure, making wise the simple; to the statutes of the Lord, which are right, rejoicing the heart; to the commandment of the Lord, which is pure, enlightening the eyes* :—there you will find a perfect rule of conduct in every condition, a sovereign antidote to preserve you from sin, and a reviving cordial to support you under affliction.

If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. The opinions of all, especially the pretensions of those who assume any extraordinary character, and publish uncommon doctrines, ought to be carefully examined by the word of God; and if found inconsistent with divine truth, they are to be rejected as hurtful and dangerous. Those who receive for truth what they never examined by the scriptures, cannot have a proper conviction of its certainty and importance, and therefore cannot rely upon it with safety and confidence. The most

* Psa. xix. 7, 8.

that can be said of religious sentiments received upon trust, depending upon the authority of those by whom they were conveyed, is what the man said of old of the head of the axe, when it fell into the water: 'Alas! master, it was borrowed.' There is equal danger of rejecting, and of acknowledging for truth, what we have not impartially examined and compared with the word of God.—If men, whosoever they be, speak not according to this rule, it is because there is no light in them. This last clause is differently rendered by the Bishop of London, in his new translation, which runs thus: "If they will not speak according to this word, in which there is no obscurity." According to this interpretation, the words express the superior excellence of the law and testimony of God beyond every other discovery of the mind of the Lord that men can enjoy. The knowledge they convey is clear and perspicuous, and far transcends that which is communicated by those who have claimed connection with familiar spirits. I shall not endeavour farther to elucidate this obscure passage, nor pretend to determine which of the two translations ought to be preferred.—That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, search the scriptures, after the laudable example of the Bereans, to see if those things which we teach, and which you hear, are founded upon them. 'Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good *.'

21 And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king, and their God, and look upward.

In this and the following verse, awful threatenings are denounced against those who reject the law and

* 1 Thess. v. 21.

testimony of God.—They who are guilty of this atrocious crime, shall pass through it; namely, through the earth, mentioned in the next verse, wandering to and fro, in a state of uneasiness and uncertainty.—*Hardly bestead*; embarrassed with difficulties, oppressed with anxieties, distressed with bitter reflections and desponding thoughts, not knowing what to do, or whither to go.—*Hungry*; destitute not only of necessary provision for their personal support, but of the word of the Lord, which is the food and nourishment of the soul, experiencing the accomplishment of the terrible calamity predicted by the prophet Amos: ‘Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it*.’ In this deplorable condition—*It shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry*, destitute of necessary provision for their subsistence, oppressed with poverty and want, and deprived of that spiritual food which is more to be desired than daily bread, their soul shall be ready to faint within them. In this forlorn state—*They shall fret themselves*; murmuring and repining at the dispensations of divine providence, and their own extreme poverty and misery. Full of impatience under the evils that they feel and fear, they shall be as much, or more distressed with their own peevishness, and other bad dispositions, as with the hunger and want to which they were to be exposed. Though hunger and poverty is indeed a great calamity, yet fretfulness of spirit is a still greater one; and when both are united, it is evident, that the mind is as empty of spiritual good as the body is of necessary provision. It is added—*And curse*

* Amos viii. 11, 12.

their king, and their God, and look upward. There is little doubt but that Immanuel, who is the King and God of Israel, is the person here intended. Him they were taught to consider as the object of their worship, and to him they were directed to look for assistance in all their straits and difficulties. At the time, however, to which this prophecy refers, that people, perceiving the terrible effects of the divine displeasure which they had incurred, were enraged, and filled with despair: they blasphemed their God after the manner of the Heathen, who cursed their gods when they did not please them. Three things are commonly united in cursing a person: a bad opinion of his character and conduct—an inveterate enmity against him—together with an earnest desire that the greatest evils may befall him. To curse God, then, is to entertain wicked, blasphemous thoughts of him in the heart; to express hatred of him, by reproaching his goodness, by arraigning his providence, and quarrelling with his worship; and to accompany these things with blasphemous imprecations. This daring insult was offered to the God of heaven, by the men who gnawed their tongues with pain, and repented not of their deeds, concerning whom we read, Rev. xvi. 9, 10, 11. This indeed is an effect frequently produced by the calamities inflicted upon wicked men, and forms a peculiar feature in their character, by which they are distinguished from those who are humble and submissive in their affliction, and bless the Lord.—*And look upward*; not to express their acquiescence in the divine appointment, or their dependence upon God, to whom the eyes of all ought to be directed, for the seasonable supply of their wants. Wicked men, when hungry and destitute, cannot with confidence thus look up to God, and express their continual dependence upon him. By this posture, they discover their dissatisfaction with what they see, and with what befalls them here below; and, in this manner, shew their pride, their insolence, and
outrageous

outrageous contempt of that glorious Person, whom they presume to execrate.—Apprized of the enormous wickedness of such conduct, and the imminent danger to which it exposes, let us shun every appearance of this evil; and cultivate a becoming reverence for that God, who is our rightful Sovereign, and for whom we ought to entertain the highest veneration and esteem.

22 And they shall look unto the earth: and behold, trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and *they shall be* driven to darkness.

Farther description is here given of the divine judgments mentioned in the preceding verse.—Those who were to experience the calamities above foretold, shall look unto the earth, *i. e.* to its inhabitants, for that relief and deliverance which they wished for in vain, and which God, in righteousness, refused to grant. Surrounded on all quarters by their enemies, and pressed beyond measure by complicated miseries, they looked around them, to see from whence they might obtain assistance. But, alas! the prospect was exceeding dark and dreadful.—*And behold trouble and darkness.* They were not only distressed by the fretfulness, the frowardness of their dispositions, and the uneasiness arising from their angry passions, which greatly increased their troubles; but, looking around them, afflictions of every kind presented themselves to view. Public calamities were every where visible: the state was overturned, the church was demolished, families were involved in ruin, and innumerable individuals were subjected to the greatest miseries; in so much that, like the apostle Paul, ‘they were often
 ‘in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by
 ‘their own countrymen, in perils by the Heathen,
 ‘in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in
 ‘perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren*.’

* 2 Cor. xi. 26.

The darkness mentioned, is not to be understood in a literal sense, denoting the absence of natural light; but in a figurative sense, signifying a distressed, miserable, and perplexed condition. In this view the word is often used in the prophetic writings; of which you will find an instance, Joel ii. 2. where a day of great trouble is called a Day of darkness. And in the verse before us, it denotes the grievous afflictions which were to be every where conspicuous at the time referred to.—*Dimness of anguish.* This expression seems intended to amplify and increase the signification of the former, and to intimate the extremity of distress to which the people spoken of were to be reduced, in consequence of their sin and folly.—The following words point at the irresistible violence with which they should be forced into this deplorable state: *They shall be driven to darkness.* The word denotes a violent compulsory act, such as cannot be successfully opposed, but shall certainly accomplish the end for which it is designed. The person and instruments, by whom they were thus forcibly expelled into darkness, not being mentioned, we suppose that the great Disposer of all events is to be considered as the chief Agent; and that the instruments he employed for this purpose, were also included in this expression.—These predictions received a partial fulfilment in the reign of Hezekiah, when the king of Babylon greatly distressed the Jewish nation, and threatened them with destruction. Their completion, however, was reserved until after the time of the great Messiah's appearance, whose law and testimony that infatuated people having rejected and despised, they were on that account reduced to a state of extreme misery and despair, in which they committed the most daring acts of impiety and blasphemy, in consequence whereof they were soon overtaken by those terrible calamities which human power could not resist. Exposed to many powerful enemies, and innumerable evils, whereby they were dreadfully agitated,

tated, they were widely dispersed, and driven into all the kingdoms of the earth: they became the objects of universal hatred and contempt; and to this day continue in the darkness of disgrace and misery, the living monuments of the divine displeasure.—

‘ Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now, if their fall be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? For I speak to you Gentiles, if by any means I may provoke you to emulation, and may save some of you *.’

* See Rom. xi. 11. *et seq.*

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

ANOTHER instance of the injudicious division of the scriptures into chapters here occurs. Cardinal Hugo, or whosoever performed this piece of work, might have easily seen, that the first verse, or rather the first seven verses of this chapter, were intimately connected with the subject treated in the last chapter. I therefore observed, when entering upon the consideration of the seventh chapter, that the second section of the last part of this prophetic discourse extended to the seventh verse of this chapter. In these verses more events are foretold, which were to precede the Messiah's appearance among the Jews, as the Prince of peace, and the great Instructor of his disciples, with some of the surprising signs, and happy effects, that were to follow his manifestation. After which, the prophet proceeds, in the third section of this discourse, warmly to expostulate with the Ephraimites, who had joined in league with the Syrians, to molest, and, if possible, to overthrow the kingdom of Judah; and to shew the equity of the divine procedure, in punishing that perfidious people for their enormous crimes. This subject is continued from the 7th verse of this chapter to verse 5th of chapter tenth. It is distributed into four parts; in each of which the sin of Ephraim is first mentioned, and then the punishment, which on that account was to be executed, is denounced. Their pride is first threatened, ver. 8.—12.—Then their insensibility, ver. 13.—17.—After which, their profligacy of manners, ver. 18.—21.—The section concludes with their iniquity and injustice, Chap. x. 1.—4.

CHAP. IX.

NEvertheless, the dimness *shall* not *be* such as *was* in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict *her* by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan in Galilee of the nations.

The prophet foretels, that the contemners of Immanuel, and his testimony, were to be involved in far greater calamities than those which befell the people of the Jews in either the first or second captivity, which they suffered on account of their transgression of the law. At the same time he declares, that, amidst the obscurity and darkness he had predicted, the light of divine grace and consolation was to arise, which should illuminate the nations.—The first vexation, and light affliction, referred to in this verse, arose from the captivity into which Benhadad, king of Syria, led many of the Israelites, when he smote Ijon, and Dan and Abel-beth-maachah, and all Cinneroth, and all the land of Naphtali, of which we read, 1 Kings xv. 20. This event no doubt gave rise to considerable vexation and distress, though it was but a light affliction compared with another and following captivity, in which the king of Assyria took Ijon, Abel-beth-maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazar, Gilead, and Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali, and carried them away to Assyria, as it is written, 2 Kings xv. 29. This calamity was greatly increased by the captivity of the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, not many years after, when Tilgath-pilnezer brought them into Halah, and Harbor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, mentioned 1 Chron. v. 26. The first-mentioned calamity lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali,

tali, the Inferior Galilee, whose possessions lying in the remote parts of the kingdom of Israel, and in the neighbourhood of Syria, were exposed to the hostile incursions of that nation. The latter affliction seized upon those who dwelt by the way of the sea; in those places that were situated upon the sea-coast, and upon those who lived beyond Jordan, in the country belonging to the two tribes and a half, in Galilee of the Gentiles, or Galilee Superior, where were many Gentiles. The inhabitants of these three districts were afflicted: those in Lower Galilee, when all Naphtali was taken; those beyond Jordan, when the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh were taken; and those in Upper Galilee, when Ijon, Dan, and Abel-beth-maachah were taken by the Assyrians. Neither the former of these, which was the more light affliction, nor the latter, which was the more grievous calamity, did equal the far more dreadful miseries which were inflicted upon the Jews, for rejecting the Messiah, his law and testimony.

Nevertheless, the dimness was not such as was in their former vexations. Dimness, you know, which arises from the infirmities of advanced age, or from affliction and grief, consists in weakness of sight, and an incapacity of clearly discerning objects according to their real importance and magnitude. In certain periods of the Jewish state, not very distant from the time of the afflictions here spoken of, their dimness, and want of perception, seem to have been very great, as is evident from several passages of their history; and particularly from the words of Azariah, recorded 2 Chron. xv. 3. 5, 6. where it is thus written: ‘Now for a long season Israel had been
 ‘ without the true God, and without a teaching
 ‘ priest, and without law.—Great vexations were up-
 ‘ on all the inhabitants of the countries.—For God
 ‘ did vex them with all adversity.’ This obscurity was to be greatly diminished, or removed, by the true

true light, which was to arise and shine upon that people. In the regions of Judea did the light of the gospel shine forth, after the appearance of the Sun of righteousness, with healing under his wings; and therefore, when the apostle Matthew mentions our blessed Saviour's going to reside at Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephtholim, he immediately adds, 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephtholim, by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people which sat in darkness saw great light: and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up *.' Those parts of the land of Israel which had suffered much in former vexations, being honoured with the presence and instructions of the Messiah, the dimness and obscurity was not such, at the time to which this prediction refers, as it was in times of lighter afflictions.—Hence we learn, that when gentle corrections prove ineffectual for reforming a person or people, God, who is righteous in all his ways, proceeds to inflict severe judgments; and the greater the crimes for which he afflicts, the greater is the punishment that he executes. This circumstance, which is worthy of your serious attention, ought to restrain you from persisting in sin, and continuing in your transgressions.

2 The people that walked in darkness, have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

These words represent the happy change which was to be introduced, by the promised Messiah, into the land of Galilee, at the time to which this prophecy

* Matth. iv. 14, 15, 16.

refers, as a blessed preface of its extension unto all the earth.—Concerning the people it is affirmed, that they walked in darkness. Darkness cannot here denote the absence of natural light, and must not be understood in the literal, but in the figurative sense, in which it is often used in scripture, to signify a state of ignorance, sin, and misery. Until the great light, here intended, is seen, people remain destitute of spiritual knowledge, and a proper acquaintance with the truths of the gospel, which seem to them enveloped in obscurity. Ignorance, like a veil, continues upon their hearts, until the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shine into their minds. In this uncomfortable state, they act under the influence of corrupt principles, emphatically called the power of darkness, committing those enormous transgressions which are justly denominated the works of darkness. From hence arise distresses and miseries of various kinds, which terminate in utter darkness, and everlasting wo, unless prevented by the illumination of the true light.—In this condition the people are described as walking, which, in the word of God, frequently denotes the whole course of man's life, in which every action makes a step toward that everlasting state to which we are journeying. Walking is a voluntary motion, the consequence of preceding choice, and deliberate resolution, very different from that which proceeds from violence, when one is drawn, or compelled by force. This circumstance affords a just representation of those who are in darkness, who, as the wise man observes, leave the path of righteousness, and walk in the way of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and to whom the ways of sin are pleasant. Walking is a continued motion, in which one step regularly follows another, until the ground intended is gone over. In this respect also, it exhibits a just view of people in darkness, who cease not to do evil, are ever repeating their sinful actions, and renewing their transgressions
against

against the Almighty. Once more, walking is a progressive motion, by which a traveller still goes forward, until he arrives at the end of his journey. In like manner, those who are in darkness proceed as it were down-hill, from evil to worse, until, if divine mercy interpose not, they are irrecoverably lost.—The people are farther described in the following words:

They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death. Of all the events that can befall mankind in this present world, death is the most awful and terrible. It separates the soul from the body, with which it was intimately connected; and deprives it of all the excellencies and advantages of which it was possessed. It pulls down in a moment the curious fabric of nature, and extinguishes life, the greatest of all temporal blessings. The countenance is then changed, the strength is dissolved, purposes perish, learning and wisdom come to nought, and every natural and acquired accomplishment depart for ever. There is no knowledge, labour, or device in the grave, whither we are hasting. Death puts a final period to mens worldly businesses, connections, and enjoyments, and to all our opportunities of improvement and service. It dislodges the human soul from its former beloved habitation; and introduces it into a state of consummate happiness or misery, of which the person's present choice, temper, and practices, hath laid the foundation: this gives it a still more solemn aspect, and more awful appearance.—As the shadow gives an exact representation of the object by which it is formed, by the shadow of death, may be meant the image of death, exhibiting, in dreadful forms, this object of dismay and terror. To dwell in the land of this shadow, denotes that such was the deplorable condition of its inhabitants, that they afforded an exact resemblance of death, by which men are deprived of all that is esteemed excellent and desirable in this world. Or the expression may signify, that they were sub-

jected

jected to the power and influence of death, exposed to anxious fears and uneasy distractions of mind, wherewith people are seized in times of imminent danger, when they know not how soon they may become a prey to this king of terrors. Though the land here spoken of, was exceedingly fruitful and pleasant, yet, on account of the miserable condition of its inhabitants, who were involved in spiritual darkness, dead in trespasses, and liable to death of the worst kind, it is said to be the region or shadow of death. In this respect, it afforded a just representation of the whole earth, which is become subject to the dominion of this universal conqueror, and in which we every where behold the images of death.—
The people of this description,

Have seen a great light : upon them bath the light shined. The light here intended, is not that which is called natural, which is the life, the beauty, and glory of the universe, whilst it discovers the immense variety of objects wherewith it is stored, manifests the evils and dangers to which we are exposed, and enables to discern innumerable circumstances that, without it, must have eluded our sagacity. By an easy figure, the term light, in the sacred oracles, is employed to express that divine light whereby spiritual darkness is expelled, and the minds of men are illuminated, quickened, and invigorated. From the application of the prophet's words to the Messiah, by the apostle Matthew, in the forecited fourth chapter and sixteenth verse of his gospel, it is evident, that they were fulfilled by the appearance of our blessed Saviour, whose person and doctrine are here intended. As a divine person, he is eternal, essential, and uncreated light, the brightness of the Father's glory; as Messiah, he is the true light which was to come into the world, to be the glory of his people Israel, and a light to enlighten the Gentiles. Under this beautiful description, he was foretold by the prophets; under this sublime character, he is spoken of
by

by the apostles; under this instructive figure, he speaks of himself. 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*.' His heavenly doctrine is emphatically denominated, by the apostle Paul, 'the light of the glorious gospel of Christ †.' This great light, when it shines into the minds of men, effectually dispels the mist of ignorance, error, and sin, that forms the darkness in which people walked previous to its appearance. It displayeth the wisdom, love, and righteousness of Jehovah in the redemption of transgressors, and layeth open to view the way of peace, into which our feet ought to be guided. Most justly does the person and gospel of Immanuel merit this character; for, like the light of the natural world, they are objects truly glorious, and pleasant to contemplate, exhibiting the wonders of God's purposes, providence, and grace. The propagation of the gospel, when at first the day-spring visited this earth, was amazingly rapid in its progress; like the rays of light, quickly extending itself over the face of the whole inhabited world. The light of the gospel, like that of the sun, shines at all times with bright and inextinguishable lustre, though not in all places at the same time. Though the light emitted by the Sun of righteousness shine around men, like that which proceeds from the sun in the firmament; to perceive its excellence and glory, to behold the wonders it reveals, and to reap benefit from the discoveries it affords, the eyes of our understandings must be opened. Those who are thus illuminated have indeed seen a great light, which of all things appears to be the most admirable and the most excellent, whilst it enables them to discern those important objects which are most necessary to be contemplated and secured.—Let us, my friends, give thanks to the Father of lights, who hath made light to arise upon

* John viii. 12.

† 2 Cor. iv. 4.

us, who were sitting in the region and shadow of death; and let us earnestly pray, that he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, may shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ *. While ye have light, believe in the light; cordially embrace the great Redeemer, thankfully receive the record of God concerning him, faithfully improve the advantages you enjoy, that ye may be the children of light, progressively advancing in the knowledge of the truth, and in all holy conversation and godliness. ‘ Yet a little while is the light with you: walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.’

3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and* not increased the joy: they joy before thee, according to the joy in harvest, *and* as *men* rejoice when they divide the spoil.

The prophet seems to have addressed these words to the most high God, in grateful acknowledgment of the great benefit he had promised, of causing light to arise upon the people that walked in darkness; and represents the happy consequences to result from that favour.—By the nation here spoken of, may be meant either the Jewish nation, who were the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; or the true Israel of God, the spiritual posterity of these illustrious patriarchs. The Almighty had promised to Abraham, his friend, that he should be a father of many nations; that he should become a great and mighty nation; and that his posterity should be innumerable, like the sand of the sea, and the stars of heaven. From various passages of the historical as well as prophetic parts of the Old Testament, these

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

and similar predictions, relative to this subject, plainly appear to have received their accomplishment under that dispensation. About the time to which this prophecy refers, when the great light was seen by those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, God multiplied exceedingly the Jewish nation, and conferred upon them many signal favours, whereby they were greatly enlarged. They filled not only the land of Judea, but great numbers of them dwelt in the neighbouring countries of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Media, and in many other places. A remarkable instance of their having been prodigiously multiplied at the period referred to, is mentioned by Josephus, who says, in his history of the Jewish wars, that, at one passover, about three millions of souls were assembled at Jerusalem *. By this amazing increase of the nation, ample ground was afforded for joy, and praise to God, especially as about this time the true Israel of God were also multiplied, and many added to the Lord of such as should be saved.

And not increased the joy ; or rather, “*Thou hast increased their joy,*” according to the new translation of the learned Bishop of London, which, though very different from that engrossed into our text, is perfectly agreeable to the Hebrew, the marginal reading, and the connection of the words. In the following part of the verse, the increased joy, here mentioned, is illustrated by two similitudes, which shew to what strength and height it attained. Joy is that agreeable affection which arises in the mind from the pleasing expectation, or actual possession, of some desirable or important blessing. To excite, preserve, and increase it, property, possession, and utility, or the prospect of them, are indispensably requisite. The poor rejoice not in the riches of the great, because they are not their property; nor do persons commonly rejoice in their property, unless they are allowed possession. The

* Book vii. chap. xvii.

separation of the latter from the former of these, gave rise to the famous contention between the Greeks and Trojans. Both property and possession must promote utility and comfort; for it is use and benefit that gives occasion to joy, and its increase. The Jewish nation derived manifold advantages from the vast increase of their numbers, and the possession of the important blessings therewith connected; and, therefore, it well became them to be joyful, and to rejoice before the Lord their God, as they were commanded*. At the time to which our prophet looked forward, God was graciously pleased to enlarge the grounds of their joy, by the appearance of the great light mentioned in the preceding verse, by restoring to them the key of knowledge that had been taken away, by removing their carnal prejudices against the truth, by giving check to the corrupt practices they had adopted from their Heathen neighbours; and, above all, by multiplying among them the happy number of his true Israel, and turning away ungodliness from Jacob.

They joy before thee, according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. The joy of the nation is here illustrated by two beautiful similitudes. The joy wherewith they joyed before God, in the services of his house, and in the duties of his worship, resembled the festivity and joy of harvest. An agreeable and plentiful harvest is indeed a season of great cheerfulness, when people are employed in reaping and collecting together the precious fruits of the earth, with which it hath pleased God, by his blessing, to crown their industry and diligence; and in laying up its rich produce for their provision, as the means of support through the ensuing year. In such a cheerful season, much ground of public joy is afforded, and gladness universally prevails through the country. One of the three solemn festivals which the children of Israel were commanded to observe

* Deut. xii. 7.

unto the Lord, in which all the males were required to appear before him at Jerufalem, was called the Feast of in-gathering, because it was kept after all the fruits of the land were collected together, and laid up in ftore. The feftivity and joy expreffed on thefe occafions, and which is vifible in the harveft-feafon, afford a lively representation of the joy which was promifed to arife from the increafe of the nation.—This joy was alfo to refemble that which people experience, when they divide the fpoil. Upon fuch occafions, joy commonly arifes to a great height. Victory being obtained after a long and desperate engagement, joy fprings up in the minds of the conquerors, in the review of the imminent dangers they have efcaped, the honour and triumph they have acquired, the peace and tranquillity they hope to enjoy, and the immense booty and fpoil with which they expect to be enriched. Accordingly we read, that after the Amalekites had fmitten Ziklag, and invaded the fouth, ‘ behold, they were fpread abroad
‘ upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing,
‘ because of all the great fpoil that they had taken out
‘ of the land of the Philiftines, and out of the land of
‘ Judah *.’ Though you cannot enter into the fpirit of this comparifon as you did of the other, the leaft attention may convince you, that the joy, here intended, muft be very great.—This prediction received its accomplifhment not long after the Son of God was manifefted, and the true light fhined; when multitudes believed, and many were added to the Lord; when the word of the Lord ran, and had free courfe, and was glorified, and churches were planted; which gave occafion of great joy to the nations of them that were faved. And bleffed be God, who, in following ages, hath more and more multiplied his true Ifrael, and thus prefented us with the nobleft grounds of joy and triumph. If gathering in

* 1 Sam. xxx. 16.

the fruits of the earth, which can only support a perishing life—if dividing the spoils of an enemy among the conquerors, render people glad and joyful—how much more ought we to exult, when we are admitted to reap in joy what was sown with tears, and to participate in the fruits of our Saviour's labour of love—when with the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, we prove victorious through his blood, and are enriched with the most precious spoils! Surely these happy events suggest the strongest reasons why we ought to be glad, and rejoice in the Lord, and his abundant goodness.

4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

These words describe another important benefit arising from the appearance of the Messiah, and lay open a new source of consolation and joy to his people.—I pretend not to determine whether or not the prophet had in view the destruction of the yoke of Assyria, by whom the Jewish nation was for some time oppressed, which happened in the days of Hezekiah, when a wonderful slaughter was made among the troops of that empire. The prediction seems to me clearly and ultimately to refer to a memorable event that came to pass soon after the great light was seen. The destruction of the Assyrian yoke introduced a typical, imperfect, and temporal deliverance; whereas by breaking the yoke, here intended, a spiritual, complete, and eternal salvation was to be enjoyed. The expressions used in this verse evidently require to be considered not in their literal, but in their figurative sense. In this view, sin seems to be the burden here spoken of. Under this description it is frequently mentioned in scripture; as where the royal psalmist complains, ' Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: ' as

‘ as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me *.’ Sinners are heavy laden with this insupportable load, which detains them from God, who alone can relieve them; enfeebles their minds; and harasses them with perplexing fears, and the most uneasy reflections. A proper sense of its powerful influence, its polluting nature, and dreadful guilt, like a crushing weight, depreiles the spirit, becomes irksome and grievous; and, if not happily removed, it will prove the means of irremediable ruin.—By the yoke of this burden, may be meant the ceremonial law, which the apostle Peter affirms, ‘ was a yoke which neither the Jews, nor their fathers, were able to bear †;’ to which, nevertheless, the teachers of that people, by their vain traditions, unwarrantably added still more weight. The Mosaic ritual was in itself a troublesome and heavy yoke, obliging all those who were subject to its authority, to observe many external ceremonies, of various kinds, which could not be performed without the utmost attention and care. Such were the commands respecting the observation of the Sabbath, the solemn festivals, the instituted sacrifices, divers washings, and the differences of meats and clothes, &c. Constant attention to these and the like circumstances, formed a yoke, which galled the necks of the Jews; and having been added, because of transgressions, until the promised seed should come, they were thereby obliged to sustain an intolerable burden.—This yoke, the prophet here says, addressing himself to Immanuel, Thou hast broken. He only, who put the yoke upon his ancient people, could break and disannul it. The Son of God, as the apostle Paul declares, when treating of this subject, blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross ‡. By the hand-writing of ordinances, may be meant the law

* Psa. xxxviii. 4.

† Acts xv. 10.

‡ Col. ii. 14.

of Moses, which contained a variety of ordinances, wherein solemn acknowledgment was made of the pollution of sin, in divers washings, and of its guilt, in the sacrifices that were offered for it. This law, which was against us, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his adorable grace, took out of the way, abolished, and disannulled it, because of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.

And the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor. In these expressions there is an obvious allusion to the cruel practice of severe task-masters, set over those reduced to slavery, who are often not only whipped, but unmercifully beaten upon the back, or shoulders, with a rod or staff. By the oppressor, may be meant the prince of this world, the great adversary of mankind, with those whom he employs to oppress and distress the people of God, who, by their usurped power, demand of them the hardest services, and inflict upon them the severest punishments. This cruel oppressor hath his staff and rod, whereby he afflicts the children of men; and the power of death, which he employs, as far as he can, for their destruction. In scripture-language, a rod is used to signify strength and power: hence we read of a rod of iron, wherewith the Son of God shall dash in pieces his enemies as a potter's vessel*. And as a rod is often used by those who exercise a kind of stern authority, to support their influence over others, it sometimes expresses rigorous and harsh treatment, cruel and unrelenting severity. In this sense we understand Psal. cxxv. 3. 'The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous.' This also seems to be the meaning of the rod of the oppressor, which Immanuel is said to have broken. He was manifested, to destroy the works and the tyranny of Satan. He came into this world, to deliver his people from a state of ignorance, guilt, and servitude,

* Psal. ii. 9.

and to introduce them into glorious liberty and felicity; to destroy the power of those by whom they were reduced to bondage and thralldom, and to translate them into his kingdom of marvellous light. By him the rod and staff of our oppressor was broken: he abolished the tyrannical dominion of the devil; he rescued us from the power of sin, from the condemnation of the law, and the hands of all our enemies. Of this prediction this is the amount, if I have not erred in taking the sum.—This abolition of the oppressor's power is illustrated in the following words, in which it is compared to a very memorable overthrow of the enemies of Israel:

As in the day of Midian. The history of the wonderful conquest here referred to, is recorded in the seventh chapter of the book of Judges, where we read, that Israel having cried unto the Lord because of the oppression of the Midianites, he sent Gideon to save them out of the hand of that people. For this purpose, the Lord commanded him to take with him three hundred men of valour, each of whom was furnished with a trumpet, and a pitcher, wherein was a lamp. In the night-time, that mighty man, with his attendants, thus accoutred, surrounded the camp of Midian; and, on the signal being given, they broke the pitchers, holding the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets with which they blew in their right hands, they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. The great host of the Midianites, suddenly seized with consternation and dread, fled with the utmost confusion, whilst every man's sword was turned against his fellow. The consequences were, that the greatest part of the Midianitish army perished; among whom were the two princes, Oreb and Zeeb; and the Israelites were delivered from under their yoke. This great deliverance prefigured the destruction of the oppressor here predicted; and, in several respects worthy of attention, we may trace a resemblance that fully justifies the comparison before us. In the day of Midian, the

enemies of Israel were discomfited by an extraordinary divine interposition, without arms, or any human assistance, though, by divine appointment, some external signs were used for this purpose. This memorable conquest exhibited an instructive representation of the overthrow of the tyranny of the prince of this world by the Messiah, when his people were saved out of the hands of them who oppressed them by the Lord their God, and not by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, nor by horses, nor by horsemen*. The means he employs for this end, are, the sounding of the trumpet of the gospel, accompanied with a secret divine power, the light of divine truth, a treasure he hath put into earthen vessels, which are frail, and easily broken. The violent destruction of these vessels hath given occasion to much confusion among the enemies of God's people, and hath often turned their arms against each other. By uniting these expedients, the great Captain of salvation hath obtained complete victory over those who oppressed his people. 'The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil †.'—From this similitude we learn, that the victories anciently acquired by the people of God, under the Old Testament, exhibited lively figures of the Messiah's conquests, recorded in the New Testament; and that we are authorized to view them in this light. By the glorious success that attended the wars of Israel against their enemies, and God's gracious interposition in their behalf, the true Israel of God are encouraged to expect, in due time, complete deliverance, and final triumph, over all their adversaries.

5 For every battle of the warrior *is* with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but *this* shall be with burning, and fewel of fire.

* Hosea i. 7.

† Psal. lxxviii. 11, 12.

This verse discloses another source of joy which was to be opened by the appearance and conquests of Immanuel, whose victories were not to be acquired in the same manner with the heroes and warriors of this world.—The battles by which they rise to honour, reputation, and conquest, are attended with confused noise. The sound of martial instruments of music, the marching of the infantry, the prancing of the cavalry, the clashing of swords, spears, and other instruments of death, and the report made by the various engines of war; generals delivering their orders, officers encouraging their men, the clamour of the multitude, the cries of the wounded, the exclamations of the timid, the groans of the dying, the victorious shouts of the conquerors, and the bitter lamentations of the vanquished; must form a hideous, confused noise, of which they only who have heard it can form a just idea. In the day of battle, not only a terrible noise, but a most affecting scene presents itself to view, far surpassing any description by which I can assist your apprehensions.—*Garments rolled in blood*: clothes all besmeared and dyed with the crimson, vital fluid, profusely flowing from the wounds of which great numbers are expiring: multitudes of dead bodies, deprived of heads, legs, and arms, from which the blood continues to pour forth; and many in the agonies of distress and death, rolling themselves, and their garments, in the blood running from their veins. It is unnecessary to enlarge on this affecting scene. Such is the confused noise that is heard in the battle of the warrior, and such the moving spectacle which it presents to view; from all which we earnestly pray, Good Lord, deliver us. In this manner the heroes of this world contend for victory and renown; but very different are the triumphs of Immanuel, described in the following words of this verse:

But this shall be with burning, and fœvel of fire.
Our God is a consuming fire, to waste and destroy

all his incorrigible enemies. The Messiah, who was to come suddenly into his temple, was foretold, should resemble a refiner's fire, that purifies gold and silver from the dross and alloy with which they are mixed. This fire Jesus Christ came and kindled upon the earth. The Holy Spirit also is spoken of under this emblem of fire, in as much as he enlightens, warms, and refreshes those who participate of his benign influence. The same figure is used to express the word of God, which consumes the wicked as a fire does the combustible materials that are placed within its reach, whilst it warms the hearts of good men, and makes them to burn within them. The powerful influence of the Son of God, exerted by his word and Spirit, and employed in carrying on his conquests, is therefore very properly represented by burning. His wicked adversaries, and the enemies of his church, he consumes by the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming; and those whom he delivers from the burden of sin, and the power of the oppressor, he refines, and purifies unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.—*And fuel of fire.* A custom anciently prevailed among some Heathen nations, of burning heaps of armour, gathered from the field of battle, as an offering to the deity, from whom the conquerors supposed they had got the victory. The Romans are well known to have used this practice as an emblem of peace. In several passages of the Old Testament, there are intimations that some such custom was observed by the Israelites, and other nations. God promised to Joshua victory over the nations of Canaan, in these words: 'And the Lord said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to-morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire *.' In allusion to this practice, the

* Joshua xi. 6.

conquest of the Messiah is here foretold, to be with fewel of fire. Having spoiled the oppressor of mankind of his armour, wherein he trusted, as an emblem of complete victory, he consigns it to the flames; *i. e.* he utterly destroys it, that it may never more be employed in acts of hostility against him.—In humble testimony of unfeigned subjection to the Prince of peace, let us throw down the weapons of our rebellion, that we may participate in the noble triumphs which he acquires, in a manner peculiar to himself, without noise or bloodshed, that he may advance the felicity of his subjects, and accomplish the total overthrow of his enemies.

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace.

The appearance of the illustrious Person, from whom should proceed the light and joy, the increase and victory, mentioned in the preceding verses, is here foretold. From the whole description given of his nativity, the office to which he was appointed, the qualifications of which he is possessed, the extent and perpetuity of his government, it plainly appears, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, manifested in the flesh, is the person intended. The magnificent titles given to this extraordinary child sufficiently determine the subject of this prophecy; for to whom but our Saviour, the great Messiah, can the characters here mentioned belong. The application of this prediction to Jesus Christ is authorized by an inspired apostle, who manifestly alludes to this passage, when speaking of our Lord's going into Galilee*; and it is supported by the angel Gabriel, who, when he announced the

* See Matth. iv. 12. *et seq.*

joyful tidings of the Messiah's nativity, described him under the characters given in the prophecy now before us. Besides, there is a remarkable similarity between the language used by Isaiah, and that of the message delivered by the angels to the shepherds, at the birth of Jesus Christ, recorded Luke ii. 10, 11. Do you then inquire, of what child doth the prophet here speak; of his own, or of some other man's? I answer, without hesitation, in unequivocal terms, he speaketh of him concerning whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, who was supposed to be the son of Joseph. Of him the Spirit of prophecy affirms,

For unto us a child is born. This expression hath an evident reference to the incarnation of the Son of God, who, in the fulness of time, took part with us of flesh and blood, was made of a woman, and assumed the character of the Son of man. In the New Testament, he is repeatedly spoken of as a child. We read, that the wise men, who were conducted by a star to the place where he was born, when they saw the young child with Mary his mother, they fell down and worshipped him *. In the prayer of the apostles, after they were liberated from prison, they requested, that the Lord might grant signs and wonders to be done in the name of his holy child Jesus †.—Of this child it is said, that he was born, intimating in what manner he was to come into this world, and to assume human nature. He did not appear merely in the form of man, as superior intelligences have sometimes done, when they descended to this earth; but he actually participated of our nature, becoming bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. In all things, sin only excepted, he was made like unto his brethren. In this manner the promised Messiah was expected to enter himself among the sons of men, as we learn from the question put by the wise men to Herod

* Matth. ii. 11.

† Acts iv. 30.

the king: 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews *?' Though this child was not born for hundreds of years after this prediction was delivered, his birth is here mentioned as having already happened. This mode of expression frequently occurs in the prophetic writings, where future events are spoken of as past or present, to denote their infallible certainty, and speedy approach.—This child is farther said to be born unto us. Though this is true of every child, who is born not for himself, but for God, for his parents, his neighbours, and his country, we are in this manner taught, that, by a voluntary act of love, the incarnation and nativity of Jesus Christ were designed for our salvation. He took upon him our nature; not on account of fallen angels, for whom a Saviour is not provided, but for apostate men, in whose destruction God might have been for ever glorified. Unto us he was born, to instruct us by his divine doctrine, to conduct us by his perfect example, to expiate our guilt by his atoning sacrifice, to sanctify us by his Holy Spirit, and to obtain for us eternal inheritance.—Would you, my brethren, celebrate, in a becoming manner, this joyful event? Like the eastern Magi, you must do him homage, open your treasures, and present unto him gifts: like the shepherds, you must return glorifying and praising God, for what you have heard and seen; and like the multitude, you must follow him, be all attention to his divine doctrine, that you may feel the salutary influence of his divine instructions.

Unto us a son is given. As the former expression relates to the human, so this respects the divine nature of the Son of God. In this sublime sense the character is commonly applied to him in scripture, as in the two following passages: 'No man knoweth the Father but the Son †: He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life ‡.' According to the record of

* Matth. ii. 2.

† Matth. xi. 27.

‡ John iii. 36.

God, Jesus Christ is the word and wisdom of God, his only begotten and well-beloved Son, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; possessing with him the same divine nature, the same glorious titles, and ineffable perfections; performing with him the same stupendous works, and receiving the same divine honours and worship.— This illustrious Person is here affirmed to be *given*. The language exactly accords with what is said concerning him in the New Testament, where our Saviour gives this short abridgment of the gospel, ‘ God ‘ so loved the world that he gave his only begotten ‘ Son *,’ &c. Jesus Christ was given to us in the eternal purpose of God: he was actually conferred, when he came into this world, and was delivered unto death, as the sacrifices of old; which, being typical of this unspeakable donation, were therefore called gifts. No present that the most high God ever made to mankind is so precious, and necessary to our felicity, as the gift of Jesus Christ; who is the light and life of the world, the Teacher of the church, the Author of salvation, the High-priest of our profession, the Governor among the nations, the righteousness, the strength, and glory of the saints. The Almighty made a noble present to man, when he gave him the luminaries of heaven to enlighten his habitation, and rain from heaven to fructify the earth; but these important favours are not worthy to be compared to the immense benefit he confers upon those who, with humility and gratitude, accept of his Son as their Saviour, Instructor, and Lord. He is therefore emphatically styled, God’s unspeakable gift; conferred upon us who were altogether unworthy of this rich donation, as plainly appears by attending to our circumstances, character, and conduct.—Notwithstanding, unto us he is given: unto the prophet Isaiah, and his countrymen, and to all in every age

* John iii. 16.

and nation, whom God hath instructed not to walk in the way of this people; who sanctify the Lord of hosts in their hearts, and make him their fear and dread; who wait upon him that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and look for him *. Jesus Christ is given for the good and benefit of all, especially for the salvation of them that believe, that he might obtain for them remission of sins, and eternal life; that he might teach them the way of truth; that he might break the yoke of the ceremonial law; take away the burden of sin, destroy the works of the devil, and the power of death.—Let us cordially receive the Son of God, who is given for these benevolent purposes, that, being intimately united to the blessed Author of salvation, we may participate in all the inestimable blessings with which the thankful acceptance of him is accompanied.

And the government shall be upon his shoulder. These words are descriptive of the important office with which the illustrious Person, here spoken of, was to be invested. The Messiah was anciently foretold to be a Ruler, who was to arise from among the standards of Israel; and, in the fulness of time, he actually appeared, sustaining this high character. The dominion of Jesus Christ is often mentioned in the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament: his regal character seems to be that in which he glories; and in performing the offices connected with it, consists much of his mediatorial excellence. All the prophets unite in exhibiting him in this view: the greatest monarchs of the Jewish nation typified him in this respect: he himself claimed universal dominion: the apostles represent him possessing supreme authority; and even Pilate, the Roman governor, acknowledged his sovereignty, and published it to the nations, by the inscription he put upon his cross. The term *government*, when applied to the Messiah, is metaphorical;

* Isaiah viii. 11. *et seq.*

for all that is comprehended in it among men, the greatest royal magnificence and power, afford only a faint and imperfect emblem of the regal dominion of Jesus Christ. There is nothing sufficiently noble in the characters of the greatest monarchs, nothing wise enough in their maxims, nothing gentle enough in their administration, nothing sufficiently glorious in their courts or exploits, fully to represent the grandeur and glory of Messiah's government. All power in heaven and in earth is committed into his hands: all things are delivered unto him by the Father. His kingdom includes not only his willing subjects, who yield unconstrained obedience to his authority, but extends to all nations over the whole world. He is Lord of all, and his dominion is over all. The Heathen are his inheritance, the utmost ends of the earth are his possession: angels, principalities, and powers, are subject to his absolute control: every creature in heaven and on earth does him homage: by him kings reign, and princes decree justice; and at last all his enemies shall be made his footstool. All judgment is intrusted to him: the whole of the divine judicial procedure is committed to the Son of God: the power of life and death, of absolution and condemnation, is put into his hands.—This government is said to be *upon his shoulder*. The expression may allude to the general opinion of mankind, who consider government as a burden, because its administration is attended with much labour, care, and solicitude. The shoulder being that part of the human body upon which heavy loads are commonly placed, the weight of government is said to be on the shoulder of Jesus Christ; who, with infinite ease, rules the universe, presides over the church, and exerts his power for the safety and happiness of his people, to the terror and destruction of all his incorrigible enemies. Or it may allude to the ancient practice of those invested with authority, who put upon their shoulder, from which it hung down, the ensign of their office, a sceptre,

a sceptre, a sword, or a key. In allusion to this custom, our Lord thus speaks of himself, as ‘having the key of David *’, or of his house; in which words he asserts his powerful rule over his church (of which the house of David was an eminent type), to admit and exclude from it whomsoever he pleaseth.—With humility and reverence, let us submit to this Governor among the nations, and study to demean ourselves as his loyal and dutiful subjects, making the service he demands the business of our lives. Then may we hope to enjoy the felicity of his people, to smile at the approach of calamity, and to rejoice that he reigneth, amid all the confusions that arise in the world.

The prophet proceeds to mention some of the magnificent titles by which he should be distinguished.

And his name shall be called. Names are sometimes employed to express the peculiar nature and excellence of the person to whom they are given. Thus when the blessed God was graciously pleased to proclaim his name from heaven, in the audience of his servant Moses, he clearly intimated the divine excellencies of his own nature and character. At other times, names are used to signify the honour, reputation, and glory, whereby one person is distinguished from others. The legislator of Israel, intending to celebrate the consummate righteousness, and awful majesty of the Lord, thus begins his triumphant song: ‘Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God †.’ The following names, by which the Messiah was characterized, may be considered in both these senses; for whilst they describe his infinite grandeur, and divine perfections, they announce the unrivalled glory of his dominion, which is suitable to the incomparable qualifications he possesses. In this view, we proceed to consider the august titles attributed to our glorious Redeemer, which he most justly deserves; and by

* Rev. iii. 7.

† Deut. xxxii. 3.

which we are instructed in the supreme excellence of his personal character, and extensive government.—The name first ascribed to him, is,

Wonderful. The constitution of our Mediator's person is truly wonderful, in which are united the Creator and the creature, the infinite God and finite human nature. In him we behold the most surprising paradox, the greatest mystery, God manifest in the flesh, which will for ever employ the admiring contemplation, and grateful praises, of all the redeemed from among men. We pretend not to explain the impenetrable mystery of his eternal Godhead, and his intimate relation to the Father as a Son. This is a subject by far too sublime for finite minds to understand and comprehend; and, therefore, the scripture teacheth us to repress vain curiosity respecting this matter. When, as a prelude to his future manifestation in human nature, the Son of God appeared to Manoah, who inquired of him, 'What is thy name;' he received for answer, 'Why askest thou after my name, seeing it is secret *,' or wonderful. And when the apostle John beheld him in vision, he affirms, that 'he had a name written which no man knew but he himself †.'—All his works are wonderful in their contrivance, execution, connection, and design; especially the work of man's redemption, whereby God is highly glorified, sin is destroyed, and sinners are saved. In the contemplation of these things, we may adopt the words of the wise man, 'I beheld all the works of God—though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it ‡;' and then exclaim, in the words of the apostle Paul, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ||!' Of the works of the Almighty men are often obliged to acknowledge their ignorance, whilst Jesus Christ gives to his disciples

* Judges xiii. 18. † Rev. xix. 12. ‡ Eccles. viii. 17.
|| Rom. xi. 33.

the most pleasing encouragement, by assuring them, that what they know not now, they shall know hereafter. Nor is his word less wonderful than his works. Admiring multitudes, in the days of our Lord's humiliation, wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth: they were astonished at the sublime truths he inculcated, the excellent privileges he described, the perfect rules which he delivered, the exceeding great and precious promises that he uttered. All these he stamped with his high authority: he connected them together, so as to form one complete system of divine truth; and accompanied them with astonishing energy and power, for accomplishing the most salutary purposes.—With humble admiration, let us frequently contemplate the glory of Jesus Christ exhibited in the gospel: let us meditate upon his works, and talk of his doings; and diligently search the scriptures, wherein the wonders of his astonishing grace are recorded.—Another name whereby the Messiah was to be called, is,

Counsellor. The Hebrew word signifies not one who takes counsel or advice, but one who gives counsel to others, and prudently points out what is proper to be done. The Son of God, the great Teacher and King of his church, consults not with any respecting his operations and designs. Who hath known his mind, or, being his counsellor, hath instructed him? He is a most able and faithful Counsellor, in all the affairs relative to his extensive empire: 'Counsel, saith he, is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding, I have strength *.' The spirit 'of the Lord,' as predicted, 'rested upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord †.' His abilities to support this character are unquestionable; and were acknowledged by multitudes, during his residence upon

* Prov. viii. 14.

† Isaiah xi. 2.

earth, who resorted to him for advice, on very difficult and momentous points, in deciding of which he displayed the most exquisite skill, and conveyed the most satisfying instruction. On two very important and interesting subjects, as to which, of all others, mankind most needed information, hath the wisdom of God been pleased to give all necessary direction: the one respects eternal life and salvation; the other relates to present temper and conduct. He hath declared, that men must come to him for life and felicity; and to encourage us to resort to him, he invites us to him with the utmost tenderness, he laments our aversion to comply, and kindly assures us of the most welcome reception. To correct the mistakes, and remove the wrong apprehensions, which even his professing people are apt to form of their spiritual condition, he who is faithful in the execution of his office, gives the good counsel which you read, Rev. iii. 18. With regard to our present temper and conduct, he hath prescribed the most excellent rules, which approve themselves to men of good understandings, and new hearts, and claim their approbation: he hath clearly pointed out the paths of righteousness and peace, which form the temper, and regulate the conduct of his disciples.—If you want advice and direction, go to him in whom dwelleth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that he may acquaint you with God and yourselves; that he may open to you the source of all those disorders that appear in the world; that he may disclose the secret spring from which flow all the blessings you receive, and the afflictions with which you are distressed; that he may explain to you all the prospects whereby you are revived, guide you by his counsel, and afterward receive you to glory.—The third designation given to this illustrious Person, is,

The mighty God. This glorious character hath a direct reference to the divine nature of the Messiah, to whom it justly belongs, notwithstanding he was a
child

child born. He is the mighty One, upon whom our help is laid; the King of glory; the Lord of hosts, strong in battle; the Almighty, without whom nothing was made that is made, and who upholdeth all things in existence. When he dwelt among men, he performed the most astonishing wonders: being put to death in the flesh, he was declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead; and now, in his exalted state, he exercises dominion over heaven and earth. Especially hath he displayed the high character here ascribed to him, by his conquest of all his own and his peoples enemies; who are so very numerous, that they are compared to bees; so very strong, that they are spoken of as fierce lions; and so very subtle, that they are likened to cunning serpents. He hath overcome Satan, our great adversary; deprived him of his dominion, overturned the foundations of his kingdom, released those whom he had taken captive, and delivered the prey out of the hand of the mighty. He hath subdued the strength of sin, by perfectly obeying the law of God in our nature, and sustaining the punishment due to our transgressions. He hath spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them on his cross: and vanquishing, in all his subjects, those corrupt lusts that war against the soul, he brings down, in their hearts, every high thing that exalteth itself against him, and frustrates all the attempts of their enemies to injure them. Having conquered for them, he will make them more than conquerors, in due time, by his blood, and the word of his testimony. Indeed he is eminently possessed of all those noble qualifications requisite to form a mighty hero, an illustrious warrior; such as greatness of mind, exquisite skill, undaunted fortitude, invincible strength, and innumerable triumphs over the mighty and terrible; in all which, as a man of war, he is most conspicuous.—Jesus Christ being the mighty God, affords the strongest evidence, that he is able to

save to the uttermost. Did we found our expectations, and repose our confidence, on created power, we should justly dread the awful curse denounced against those who trust in man, and make flesh their arm, which you find written, Jeremiah xvii. 5, 6. : whereas contemplating our Saviour as the mighty God, how cheerfully may we confide in his atonement, grace, and government! Most justly, therefore, does it become us to magnify the Lord, and with our spirits to rejoice in God our Saviour.—The fourth character mentioned, is,

The everlasting Father. The name of Father is sometimes used in scripture to denote the author or cause from which any thing proceeds. Thus the Almighty, to convince Job of his imbecility and ignorance, inquires, among other things, ‘Hath the rain ‘ a father *?’ The obvious meaning of the question is, By what cause or principle in nature is it produced? In this sense, Jesus Christ is the Father of all his spiritual posterity, in as much as he is the Author of their eternal salvation, and from him they derive everlasting life. Through his favour and appointment, they enjoy the means whereby eternal life is attained: he grants them right to it, in their justification to life by his righteousness: he conveys the foretastes of it, in those blessed discoveries which are the objects of their faith and hope: he gives them the earnest of his Spirit; and, in due time, the full and undisturbed possession. Though there are both external and internal means whereby men become partakers of his redemption, his atonement and intercession are the only meritorious cause whereby it was obtained; his Holy Spirit, and glorious power, are the alone efficient cause by which it is communicated. From the Son of God proceeds all that light and life, wisdom and strength, peace and joy, of which his children participate. He makes them partakers of a divine nature;

* Job xxxviii. 28.

he renews them after his image; he introduces them into the spiritual world; he writes upon them the name of his God; he takes care of their interests; he supplies their wants; he instructs them in the most excellent knowledge; he preserves them from evil, and trains them up for an eternal inheritance; performing toward them, in every respect, the part of an affectionate and faithful parent.—Of Messiah the prophet affirms, that he is an *everlasting* Father. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, without beginning of days, or end of life. He was, he is, and he is to come, the first and the last. Concerning himself he thus speaks, ‘ Before Abraham was, I am *.’ ‘ The Lord possessed him in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. He was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was †.’ Justly, therefore, did the prophet Micah affirm, ‘ that his going forth hath been of old, from everlasting ‡.’ or from the days of eternity. He is also an everlasting Father, who never dies, over whom death hath not dominion; who never ceases to stand in this endearing relation to all his children; and who never leaves them destitute of his paternal care, and comfortable presence. The happy number of his spiritual offspring are always increasing: his family is continually enlarging: in consequence of which, race unto race shall praise his name, which shall be gratefully remembered throughout all generations.—From the eternity of Jesus Christ as a Father, we joyfully infer the perpetuity of his children. This agreeable conclusion we are taught by the prophet Habakkuk, ‘ Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God; mine holy One? we shall not die ||.’ Thy spiritual posterity shall continue for ever upon earth (we exult in the prospect). ‘ Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth §. The children of thy servants shall conti-

* John viii. 58.

† Prov. viii. 22, 23.

‡ Micah v. 2.

§ Hab. i. 12.

¶ Psal. xlv. 16.

‘nue, and their seed shall be established before thee *.’ One generation shall arise after another, while the sun and the moon endure: and when we retire from this world, if we belong to thy divine family, we shall eternally live with God, in the enjoyment of ineffable glory and felicity.—The last title here ascribed to Jesus Christ, is,

The Prince of peace. In both the Old and New Testaments the Messiah is frequently spoken of as a Prince, a name which justly belongs to him, on account of the royal majesty in which he is invested, and the supreme dignity and authority to which he is exalted. Under this description he was anciently foretold by the prophet Ezekiel, in these words: ‘I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them †.’ This prediction relates not to David, the Son of Jesse, but to Jesus Christ, who is sometimes called by the name of that patriarch, as will be evident by comparing the passage cited, with Chap. xxxvii. 25. of the same prophecy, where God promises that his servant David shall be prince of Israel for ever. The prophet Daniel speaks of him in the character of Messiah the Prince, and the Prince of God’s people. - In the New Testament he is called ‘the Prince of life ‡;’ the Prince of the kings of the earth, from whom all the potentates of the world receive their crowns and their kingdoms, by whose permission they govern their subjects, and to whom they are accountable for the exercise of their regal power. In this exalted character he shines with unrivalled glory. Having ascended his celestial throne, and being crowned with glory and honour, he is proclaimed King of kings, and Lord of lords; invested with the ensigns of royalty, and princely dominion, he obtains the most wonderful conquests, he confers the most liberal donations, he enacts the most excellent laws, and at last he will execute judgment upon

* Psal. cii. 28.

† Ezek. xxxiv. 24.

‡ Acts iii. 15.

all according to their works.—In the words before us, this great Person is designed Prince of peace. As the infallible Teacher of mankind, he preached peace to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh: as the great High-priest over the house of God, he obtained peace to his people, by the precious blood he shed upon the cross: and as the gracious King of Zion, he creates peace, by the fruit of the lips; *i. e.* by the ministry of the gospel, he actually bestows this inestimable blessing upon his innumerable happy subjects. Having obtained for his people the pardon of their sins, and grace to enable them to resist its power, he grants them reconciliation with God, whom they had offended; thus terminating the destructive war that sin had kindled between God and man. He gives them peace with their own consciences, with which they were at variance; peace with one another, among whom discord had arisen; and peace with the whole creation, which acted in hostility toward man, who had risen up in rebellion against God. In few words, this comprehensive blessing includes every thing necessary to the felicity and comfort of his people.—Would you, my brethren, experience true blessedness? Submit yourselves to the mild government, and gentle administration of this peaceable Prince, and let his righteous dominion afford you ground of joy and triumph. Place your happiness not in the transitory, unsatisfying enjoyments of this present world, but in the possession of that sacred peace which the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven to negotiate and establish upon earth, whereby his glory, and the best interests of men, are greatly advanced.—These are the peculiar characters here assigned to the Messiah, whose illustrious appearance is foretold. In every view in which he is exhibited, you behold consummate excellence, and astonishing grace, which open a variety of sources, from whence proceed the most salutary instructions, and the most refreshing consolations.

7 Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever: the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

In this verse several remarkable properties of the government of the Prince of peace are mentioned, worthy of particular attention.—The vast amplitude, and growing extent, of the Messiah's kingdom first requires to be considered. Its increasing magnitude, and progress toward maturity, is beautifully represented in the parable, wherein it is compared to a grain of mustard-seed, which, though one of the least of seeds, soon becometh a large tree, so that the birds of the air lodge in the branches thereof. When the word of the kingdom was first sown in Judea, by a few illiterate persons, who had followed the meanest employments, its appearance was contemptible, and its influence seemed for some time imperceptible. This small seed, however, soon sprung up, through the blessing of God, increased exceedingly, and spread through the whole world, bringing forth much fruit to the divine glory. Falling into the good and honest heart, prepared for its reception, it quickly became conspicuous for strength, beauty, and fertility, so that all nations resorted under its shadow. Like leaven mixed with meal, which communicates its influence to the whole mass, the word of the kingdom, by its benign operation, diffused itself through the rising government of the Son of God: it penetrated the heart; it enlightened the understanding; it warmed the affections; it inspired with like precious faith and obedience; and so assimilated his subjects to one another, that they became one bread and one body; whilst, by an invisible energy, it spread throughout cities and nations. The kingdom of Jesus Christ commenced soon after his resurrection; and, from
tha'

that memorable period, is continually advancing toward the perfection it shall attain at the consummation of all things. By means of successive great events, in many respects similar and connected with one another, it is enlarged and established; and, therefore, in scripture, they are called the coming of Christ's kingdom. The first to which I refer, was, the ministry of the apostles, by whom its foundations were laid, and its interests highly advanced, among the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles, spoken of under this description, Matth. xvi. 28. The second event happened under the reign of Constantine, when the Heathen Roman empire was overturned, and the church of God, delivered from persecution, was permitted to enjoy external tranquillity, mentioned in the sixth chapter of the Revelation. The third shall be accomplished by the abolition of the power of Antichrist, foretold in the seventh chapter of the book of Daniel. The fourth and last event, is, the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the final judgment, which, with peculiar propriety, is called his coming in his kingdom. By each of these remarkable incidents, the government of Messiah is increased. The means employed for this purpose, were, the miraculous powers conferred upon the first Christians; the distinguished abilities of many converts to Christianity; their indefatigable activity and zeal in propagating the gospel; their eminent piety, and holy lives, whereby they vindicated their profession from the absurd cavils of their adversaries: to which I must add, the invincible fortitude and patience, with which they sustained the most excruciating sufferings. In this manner hath the kingdom of Jesus Christ been enlarged: and being assured that its increase shall have no end, we look forward, with hope and joy, to that happy period, when the sound of the gospel shall be heard unto the ends of the world; when it shall be again preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; when mystical Babylon shall fall, the Jews be
brought

brought in, with the fulness of the Gentile nations; when the power of godliness shall appear in the tempers and lives of multitudes, the love of God and man, and the practice of righteousness shall prevail through all the earth. This prosperous condition of Christ's kingdom here below, shall be succeeded by a far more glorious state in heaven, when, having reached its perfection, it shall flourish through immortal ages.—Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; and fulfil all thy promises, advance thy kingdom of grace, and hasten the manifestation of thy kingdom in glory.—This prophecy likewise gives the strongest assurance, that

Of the increase of his peace there shall be no end. Peace, in the sacred writings, oft-times denotes freedom from acts of hostility, and all manner of disturbance, accompanied with the enjoyment of the most agreeable tranquillity, inward serenity of mind, and outward quietness of condition. The apostle James, inquiring into the causes from which wars and fightings proceed, determines, without hesitation, that they arise from mens lusts, which war in their members. Corrupt dispositions are the causes of those commotions that arise in the mind, and of those terrible convulsions by which kingdoms have been overturned, and mankind distressed. These are the Jonahs, that raise the storm; these are the Achans, that troubleth society. To restore tranquillity to the mind, these run-aways from God must be thrown overboard; these troublers of Israel must be destroyed; then rest and quietness will happily succeed. To allay those tumultuous passions whereby the minds of men are agitated, to remove the sense of guilt with which they are distressed, to dispel those alarming fears of judgment by which they have been terrified, the Prince of peace publishes the joyful tidings, that God's anger is turned away; that sin is expiated, reconciliation is made for iniquity, and everlasting righteousness brought in, the effect of which is quietness and
assurance

assurance for ever. This is the door by which peace, that passeth all understanding, enters into the heart: this is the way that leads into the kingdom of God; which consisteth in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. With peace the Son of God bleaseth his people: he extendeth it to them in abundance, even as a river; he speaketh peace to them; he calleth them to peace; he commandeth them to live in peace; assuring them, that the God of love and peace shall be with them. He powerfully restrains those unruly passions which disturb peace with God, with their own consciences, and with their brethren: he knits together their hearts in the bond of love; he fills them with the fruits of the Spirit, and inclines them to live in unity and peace. This blessed temper is the distinguishing badge whereby they know one another, and by which strangers know to what society they belong: 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,' saith Jesus Christ, 'if ye have love one to another *.' To engage them with the greatest assiduity to cultivate this sacred concord, the most powerful arguments are laid before them.—Great then must be the peace of Messiah's subjects, as we see most illustriously exemplified after his ascension into heaven, when those who were formerly bitter enemies to one another, were of one heart and one soul. So conspicuous was the affection that reigned among Christians in primitive times, that their enemies remarked, that they loved one another. And though, in latter times, it hath been said, that Christians have just religion enough to make them hate one another; yet this reproach shall ere long be wiped away, when the spirit and power of godliness shall again happily prevail. Nor shall the peace of Christ's kingdom have an end; for when it shall arrive at its full completion in heaven, all its innumerable subjects shall for ever enjoy uninterrupted tranquillity in the highest perfec-

* John xiii. 35.

tion.—You who profess to be subjects of the Redeemer, cherish, I beseech you, concord and good agreement among yourselves, and beware of strife and contention. You are brethren; see that you fall not out by the way. If you are the house of Christ, in which he means to take up his residence, take heed that you set it not on fire by animosities and quarrels. If he hath taken you from among the Gentiles, to be a people for his name, remember, that a divided, wrangling people can never be an honour to the Prince of peace.—Let us next contemplate the seat of his empire:

Upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom. A throne is frequently attributed to the Son of God in scripture, from whence he displays his glory, and attends to the supplications of his people. A kingdom is likewise ascribed to him, over which he presides, constituted of all who yield subjection to him as their Lord, toward whom he acts as their gracious Sovereign. The throne and kingdom here meant, are not to be literally, but figuratively understood; not of those once occupied by the son of Jesse, which were typical of the spiritual throne and kingdom of Jesus Christ that he erects in the hearts of his people, where he reigns by his power and grace, the glory whereof is represented in the gospel, and shall be consummated at the last day. The throne and kingdom here intended, is distinguished by the name of David, which is one of the names given to the Messiah, of whom that renowned patriarch was an eminent type. David, the servant of the Lord, was anointed king over his people Israel, in Jerusalem: Jesus Christ, the servant of Jehovah, was anointed, with the oil of gladness, king over the whole Israel of God, in the New Jerusalem. All the promises made to David were completely verified to Jesus Christ, who, descending from him according to the flesh, literally had right to the throne and kingdom of his father. The throne and kingdom here spoken of,

are not of this world; they are not of earthly origin, nor take their rise from human compact or agreement, but proceed entirely from God. They are not designed to promote earthly purposes, but for recovering mankind from ignorance, error, and sin, and re-uniting them to God, as their rightful Sovereign, and chief good. They are supported not by worldly, but by spiritual means; by prayer, by manifestation of the truth, by strength of evidence, by conviction of the judgment, and the conquest of the heart. Nor does the government of Jesus Christ interfere with the interests of earthly kingdoms. His doctrines and precepts, far from being hostile to civil government, or freeing subjects of their allegiance to their lawful rulers, inculcate obedience to their just commands: his title to his throne is not incompatible with the rights of earthly princes, nor his power with their legal authority over their subjects, whom he requires to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's. From all which we learn, that the genuine subjects of Messiah's kingdom are, like their Master, not of this world*. In their temper and conduct they are not conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of their minds. Their condition, in this life, also is like that of their Lord; for as he was, so are they, in this world, strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, looking for another and better country, that is an heavenly.—Once more, let us consider the order, stability, and perpetuity of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, which are thus expressed:

To order it, and to establish it with judgment, and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The Son of God, by whom all things consist, hath established a beautiful order in society, which becomes either happy or miserable according as that order is observed or violated. In the new creation, he hath restored

* John xv. 19.

that harmony and proportion which sin hath universally disturbed among mankind. He restores to order the temple of the human heart, once remarkable for the exquisitely fine disposition of all its faculties, which regularly observed their offices, and performed their various operations. He disposes all his faithful subjects to respect things according to the order wherein he hath placed them, and to give them precedence in their affection and practice according to their intrinsic excellence and real utility. Hence, when acting under the influence of his instructions, they prefer heaven to earth, a general to a particular good, a spiritual to a temporal, an eternal to a present benefit, they obey God rather than man, and so assent his laws that proper regard may be given to each agreeable to its importance. He hath appointed a comely subordination of condition and station in his kingdom, assigning to every one his proper place and duty, to which he directs them carefully to attend, requiring strict regard to order in spending precious time, in exercising discipline, in waiting upon his ordinances, and in directing our footsteps in his word. The ruin of nations and states hath often originated from the disorder and confusion that hath arisen among the people, which, in some instances, have terminated in their destruction. From this circumstance, in conjunction with others, the kingdom of our Lord derives stability. Thus he continually adjusts and orders all its concerns with consummate wisdom and equity.—*With judgment and justice.* These two words are frequently joined together in scripture, where they are used in different senses, which I shall not stay at present to point out. In the passage before us, judgment may denote a clear and accurate knowledge of what ought to be done; and being ascribed to a person clothed with supreme authority, it may farther include the trial and discovery of the true state of every matter coming under his cognizance. Justice may be intended to express the subsequent determination

termination formed according to the perfect rule of equity, for the punishment of transgressors, and the encouragement of patient continuance in well-doing. The destruction of states and empires hath often proceeded from the neglect of the proper distribution of justice, and the right exercise of judgment; whereas judgment and justice are the grand pillars whereby our Lord's throne and kingdom are supported, and therefore they shall be established for ever.—The everlasting duration of the government of the Son of God is expressed in these words: *From henceforth and for ever.* The kingdoms of this world, not like the kingdom of our Lord, continue only for a limited time: after they have attained the zenith of their glory, they soon begin to decline, and ere long are lost in the revolutions of time. Prior to the establishment and wide extension of the government of Jesus Christ, four great empires, beside the nation of Israel, successively flourished, decayed, and mouldered away: I mean the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman. The principles which operated to their downfall and destruction were interwoven in their very constitution, and never ceased to act until they produced their ruinous effects. Not so the dominion of the Son of God, which is established with judgment and justice, that shall perpetuate its duration through immortal ages. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed. His throne is for ever, and men shall fear him as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. Eternity adds a peculiar lustre to our Lord's government, and unspeakably advances the felicity of his subjects; and, therefore, is once and again mentioned in this verse—of it there shall be no end, and it shall be from henceforth and for ever.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. Zeal is a mixed passion, in which love, grief, and anger, are united. It comprehends ardent affection and solicitous

licitous concern for the welfare of its object, unfeigned grief and sorrow when it is opposed or injured, accompanied with strong expressions of displeasure and indignation against whatever might counteract the design it hath in view to accomplish. Properly speaking, it is not any particular affection or disposition, but a quality of which every other grace ought to be possessed, or rather an essential ingredient necessary to their vigorous exercise. In men it becomes laudable or culpable, and is approved or censured in scripture, according as it is well or ill directed, terminating upon proper or improper objects. When attributed to God, as in the words we are considering, it may denote his infinite love and tender regard for the sacred interests of his kingdom and glory, his grief and just displeasure awakened by every thing that might retard or oppose their establishment, prosperity, and perpetuity. Apply this description of zeal to the subject before us, and then we may suppose this to be the import of the prophet's expression. The glory of God's great name, his faithfulness pledged in his promises, and his ardent desire to advance the happiness of his people, secure the exact fulfilment of the joyful predictions contained in this and the preceding verse. He who hath said, will perform; he who hath spoken, will make it good. He is the Lord of hosts, to whom the whole creation is subject, who disposes of all creatures and events according to his pleasure; and, therefore, no obstruction, no power however great, can possibly hinder the accomplishment of these glorious things which the Almighty hath foretold by his servant Isaiah.—May the zeal of the Lord of hosts to perform this that he hath promised, inspire each of us with a warm and active zeal to promote the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, by the lively exercise of every good disposition, and the faithful performance of every commanded duty, that, in this manner, we may become workers together with God. Let us cordially subject ourselves

selves to our eternal Sovereign, humbly submitting
 our understandings to his truths, our wills to his
 laws, our interests to his management, cheerfully
 consecrating our whole lives to his service and obe-
 dience. ‘ O Lord our God, other lords besides thee
 ‘ have had dominion over us: but by thee only will
 ‘ we make mention of thy name*. Ye are not your
 ‘ own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore
 ‘ glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which
 ‘ are God’s†.’ To this end, may the living God,
 for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ, richly bless to
 us the truths which we have now heard, that they
 may bring forth in us, through the benign influence
 of the Holy Ghost, the fruits of holiness and righ-
 teousness, that, in the hours of suffering and intervals
 of joy, in life and death, we may derive from his go-
 vernment, strength, and comfort, and blessing. Amen ‡.

§ ¶ The LORD sent a word into Jacob, and
 it hath lighted upon Israel.

In the third section of his discourse, which com-
 mences with these words, the prophet proceeds to ex-
 postulate with the Ephraimites respecting the various
 crimes of which they were guilty, and to shew the
 equity and certainty of the punishments threatened to
 be inflicted upon these accounts.—The verse now
 read may be considered as introductory to this sub-
 ject, in which that people are reminded of the inesti-
 mable, distinguishing favour they had received from
 God. *The Lord sent a word into Jacob.* To the poste-

* Isaiah xxvi. 13.

† I Cor. vi. 20.

‡ The Author, in lecturing through this prophecy, discoursed
 at more than ordinary length on a number of passages, of which
 the one now finished may be considered as a specimen. Judging it
 unnecessary to alter the form in which these Lectures were delivered,
 and hoping that the more copious illustration of some remarkable
 places of this sacred book may be acceptable to the Reader, he
 makes no apology for following out his original plan.

rity of that great patriarch, which still continued to bear his name, God was graciously pleased to afford the revelation of his will, which is sometimes emphatically called a *word*. Though it is comprised in several books, and contains a law that is exceeding broad, yet because of the intimate connection and perfect harmony of all the parts of which it is composed, and the unity of design that pervades the whole system, it is spoken of as a *word*, from which no part can be taken away, and to which nothing can be added, unless its signification and usefulness is either much injured, or totally changed. For the precious donation of this *word*, the highly favoured people to whom it was sent, by the ministry of the prophets, were invited to praise the Lord: ‘He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord *.’ The word, of which Isaiah here speaks, denotes, more particularly, the messages delivered by his cotemporaries, Hosea and Amos, as well as those which he himself published, by the command of God, to the Ephraimites, the posterity of Jacob, in which awful judgments were denounced against them, on account of the highly aggravated transgressions they committed. In this limited sense our prophet uses the expression, in the message that he sent to king Hezekiah respecting Sennacherib: ‘This is the word that the Lord hath spoken concerning him †. And, in the passage before us, it seems requisite to explain it in the same restricted meaning, as being more especially intended.

And it hath lighted upon Israel. The words are metaphorical; and may allude to the practice of shooting an arrow, throwing a dart or other weapon, with the design of hitting the object that is aimed at. Or the expression may refer to what hap-

* Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.

† Isaiah xxxvii. 23.

pens when the husbandman is employed in sowing grain in the field; the corn falls upon the ground into which it is cast, where, you know, it dies, it is quickened, it springs up, and brings forth in different proportions. To whichever of these practices there is allusion, the meaning of the assertion is the same. The word that God sent into Jacob hath lighted upon Israel: it did not prove ineffectual; it reached the people to whom it was sent, and executed the purposes for which it was intended. Like the sharp arrows of the mighty, it hit and wounded those at whom it was directed: it penetrated their hearts, and excited strong remorse and anguish of conscience. Like the seed sown in the field, it sometimes fell upon those who resembled the way-side, which remains hard and uncultivated; sometimes it dropt upon those who were obdurate and insensible, as the stony ground; at other times it lighted upon thorny ground, where it was soon choked; whilst some of it fell into the good and honest heart, where it brought forth fruit with patience. People of every description experienced the truth of this word, and beheld the justice and veracity of God displayed in the accomplishment of the predictions to which Isaiah refers in this declaration, whilst the messages sent to them by the prophets, proved, by the event, that they were not false alarms, or vain threatenings.—Though the Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, affording transgressors time to repent, that iniquity may not be their ruin, he will by no means clear the guilty, who go on in their trespasses, and refuse to improve the season allowed them for returning to him. Upon such the word of threatening shall light, and they shall be punished for their sins. This event is so certain and determined, that it is spoken of as already come to pass, with respect to the people of Israel.

9 And all the people shall know, *even* Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart.

The extensive effects with which the word above mentioned was to be accompanied are here described.—The subjects of this prediction were, all the the people of Ephraim, and the inhabitants of Samaria, the chief city of that kingdom, who, on this occasion, expressed very unbecoming sentiments, in a haughty and obdurate temper of mind. These were to be experimentally acquainted with the threatenings denounced by the prophets, and to be thoroughly convinced, by what they saw and felt, of their truth and certainty. For long time they would not believe nor regard the solemn, repeated declarations published by the servants of the Lord, nor endeavour to comply with their design, by forsaking their evil ways; therefore should they know, in the most sensible manner, that the word of God cannot fail of being punctually fulfilled.—In their language, the Ephraimites discovered *pride and stoutness of heart*; and were determined, it seems, to act up to the following resolution, which they expressed with much haughtiness and insolence: ‘The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones,’ &c. A proud and stubborn disposition seldom fails to discover itself in the gesture, the looks, the actions, and the speech of those who act under its pernicious influence; and never appears more absurd and foolish than when it shews a vain conceit of their supposed advantages, connections, and prospects, a wicked contempt of God, his promises, and threatenings, with a violent opposition to his righteous dispensations. A striking proof of the truth of this observation lies before us in this verse, taken in connection with what follows.—Let the counsel of devout Hannah be acceptable to you, my friends: ‘Talk no more so exceeding proudly, let not arrogancy come out of your mouth:’
‘for

‘ for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him ‘ actions are weighed *.’ Beware of pride and stoutness of heart, from whence proceed the contentions that arise in families, societies, and nations, which are often attended with dangerous consequences. Be assured that these dispositions are odious to God, and a certain source of bitter calamities to individuals and nations, and therefore ought to be carefully avoided.

10 The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change *them into cedars.*

These words express the haughty and obstinate resolution formed by the people of Ephraim, notwithstanding the frequent admonitions they received from the prophets of the Lord.—To perceive the criminality of this purpose, you must know, that the Almighty had already testified his just displeasure against that nation for their sins, by sending against them the king of Assyria, by whom they were greatly distressed, so that many of their houses were demolished and become ruinous. Instead, however, of being deeply humbled for their transgressions, which procured those desolating judgments, and learning the important lessons of humility and submission, their pride was increased, and their obstinacy was confirmed. With haughtiness and obduracy of spirit, they used the unbecoming language of this verse, and thus betrayed their contempt of the messages that God had sent them by his servants. The words are easy to be understood, and require little exposition. Houses built of brick and sycamore trees, which are not remarkable for strength or durability, are far from being so firm and beautiful as those built of hewn stones, and finished with cedars. The determination of the Israelites to employ the latter in place of the former, plainly

* 1 Sam. ii. 3.

intimates, that they were resolved to use stronger and better materials in building their houses than formerly they had done. The walls, the roofs, and the finishing of the buildings they were hereafter to erect, should be composed of the best stone, and of the strongest and most durable timber. In this manner they explicitly declared their secret unbelief and open contempt of the divine threatenings, according to which they were soon to be destroyed by their enemies. This circumstance rendered their language, which in itself was inoffensive, highly criminal, and exposed them to the severe judgments denounced in the two following verses.—Thus warned, let us not flatter ourselves that we shall escape threatened calamities, if we proudly and obstinately persist in making light of the instructions we receive from God, and act in direct contrariety to the admonitions that are given us.

11 Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together.

12 The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

In these verses the judgments are foretold that God was about to inflict upon Israel for the sin above described.—A treaty of alliance now subsisted between Ephraim and Syria, upon which the confident expectation of the former was chiefly placed. The Governor among the nations, however, admonishes that people, that the very alliance with which they were so highly pleased should become the mean of their destruction. The adversaries of Rezin, king of Syria, whom the Lord was to stir up against him, were doubtless the Assyrians, who afterward smote Samaria,

ria, the chief city of Syria, carried the people away captive, and rendered that kingdom a province of their empire. Thus Assyria, Syria, and the other enemies of Israel, were to be united; and having joined their forces and arms, they were to attack Ephraim on different quarters.—The event here foretold presents to our view a striking instance of the vanity of human confidence, and the certainty of divine vengeance. Sinners may entertain delusive hopes of safety from an arm of flesh, but God will frustrate their expectations, and make them feel, that cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. ‘Put not your trust in
 ‘princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there
 ‘is no help. Happy is he that hath the God of
 ‘Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his
 ‘God*.’

The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind, and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. The Syrians, with whom the Ephraimites had been confederate, were to invade and assault them before, *i. e.* on the east; whilst the Philistines, the ancient, inveterate enemies of Israel, were to attack them at the same time behind, *i. e.* on the west side. The hostile exertions of these nations were not to prove unsuccessful: their armies, marching from opposite quarters, with uninterrupted good fortune, should at last join and mingle together in the land which they meant to conquer. The consequences should be, as here predicted by our prophet, *They shall devour Israel with open mouth.* The expression seems to allude to wild beasts, who greedily fall upon their prey, and voraciously devour it in the manner here mentioned. Like them the enemies of Israel were cruel, and fond of rapine: they were licentious and lewd, violent and impetuous, oppressive and tyrannical in their treatment of those who fell into their power. They were, in some

* Psal. cxvi. 3. 5.

respects, to resemble the nation of whom the prophet Joel thus speaks: ‘ A nation is come up upon my land, strong and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek-teeth of a great lion *.’ Fierce and rapacious in their nature, they were to exercise the most wanton and savage cruelty upon those who became their prey. Thus was the people of Ephraim to be punished for their pride and obduracy. Accordingly after Tiglath-pilezer had vanquished Syria, and incorporated the Syrians into his army, he invaded the kingdom of the ten tribes, and carried away the people captive to Assyria and Media †. It is very probable that about the same time the Philistines discovered their old hatred of Israel, by taking advantage of the distresses in which they were involved, invading and harassing them to the utmost of their power.—Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased. This is one of the fundamental maxims laid down by Jesus Christ, according to which he acts in the government of the world, and of the truth of which he presents to view a remarkable instance in this prediction. The proud and insolent language and conduct of Ephraim brought upon them the desolation here foretold, which loudly calls on us to beware of pride, which is one of the certain prelates of destruction.

For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. These words occurred in Chap. v. 25. and are three times repeated in this chapter, to shew that the displeasure of God against Ephraim was not to be averted by the execution of the judgments predicted, provided their repentance and reformation did not interpose to prevent farther and greater calamities. The wrath of the Almighty was not yet pacified: the justice of God was not yet satisfied: the enormous crimes of that stubborn people were not fully compensated by the foretold distresses

* Joel: 6.

† See 2 Kings xvi. 7.

and miseries, which were to be followed by others that were greater and more formidable.

13 ¶ For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts.

Insensibility and impenitence is another crime with which the Ephraimites are here charged. The omniscient God clearly foresaw, that notwithstanding the above-mentioned calamities were to be inflicted, and his hand should evidently appear still to be extended to chastize them with more severe judgments, they would not be attended with proper effects. He, therefore, informs them, by his servant the prophet, what would be the certain consequences of their depravity and incorrigible disposition.—The God and Father of his people is here spoken of under the description of *him that smiteth*. Though perfectly good, and taking no pleasure in those evils with which he sees necessary to visit the human race, yet for wise and salutary purposes he afflicts them. The manner in which he proceeds to this strange work, as our prophet afterward calls it, displays his benignity, his tender compassion, and long-suffering. He begins by admonishing of the danger of transgression, which, if not abandoned, leads on to irretrievable ruin. If his instructions are attended to, and produce their proper effects, the end he hath in view being answered, he proceeds no farther in the character of reprovcr. If, however, his counsels are rejected, and his people continue to go on in their trespasses, he remonstrates against their ingratitude, their folly, and wickedness, and alarms them with awful threatenings. Should these prove ineffectual, he corrects them with equity and judgment; and if lighter chastisements are despised, he more grievously afflicts with greater calamities, and thus acts in the character of him that smiteth. In the whole of this procedure, his design is not to injure, but to do good to his people; not to
destroy

destroy them, but their sins; not to withdraw from them, but to draw them nearer to himself; not to consume them, but to preserve them from utter ruin. In smiting Ephraim, he reminded them of the just desert of sin, whereby they had wickedly departed from him; and inculcated upon them the indispensable necessity of repentance, and an immediate return to him from whom they had deeply revolted.—Such being the gracious intention of God in afflicting that people, he justly expected they would have turned unto him, and sought the Lord of hosts. What an obstinate, perverse people must they have been, who, instead of turning to the Lord, and seeking him early, in the time of their distress, held fast their iniquities, and refused to let them go? Strongly attached to their vices, hardened through prejudices, vitiated by corrupt affections, deluded by false prophets, and accustomed to wicked practices, in which they were confirmed by commerce with neighbouring nations, they had become proof against the rebukes and chastisements of divine providence.—Instructed as to the danger of despising the chastening of the Lord, remember, when you are smitten, speedily to return unto him who waiteth to be gracious, and early to seek him who allows none to seek him in vain. In all the afflictive dispensations with which you may be visited, seek the Lord. Acknowledge, with humility and meekness, the weight of the burden he hath laid upon you: earnestly request him to shew you wherefore he contendeth with you, to strengthen you to bear your distress with patience and submission, to remove his stroke from you in good time, and to grant you to be rightly exercised under your afflictions, that they may yield those peaceable fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

14 Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush in one day.

15 The

15 The ancient and honourable, he *is* the head: and the prophet that teacheth lies, he *is* the tail.

In these verses the total overthrow of the kingdom of Israel is foretold, as the punishment merited by the neglect and contempt of God above mentioned.—The prediction is delivered in a proverbial form, expressing the dissolution of the whole body of the state, and the destruction of all ranks and conditions of men among them, the two extremes of which are here figuratively described. At the head of Israel stood the ancient and honourable among that people, the prince and the rulers, the priests and the prudent, with those who occupied the most eminent stations, who were esteemed the most respectable persons in the nation, and possessed the greatest influence in managing its affairs. Not only were these elevated to high rank to be cut off, but those also who were mean and contemptible, such as the prophet that teacheth lies, who is the tail. Of all the people in the kingdom, he is the worst and lowest who basely yields adulation to those who are in power; and that he may gain their favour, and acquire some of the emoluments they have at their disposal, prophesies falsehood, and speaks deceit and lies.—The suddenness of this general devastation is expressed in these words: *Branch and rush in one day.* Though the prophet does not say who were intended by these metaphorical descriptions, it is not difficult to know who were the persons he had in view. In consistency with his explanation of the other figurative terms, they may denote the strong and the weak, the old and the young, the great and the small; those who were bended or moved with difficulty, and those who were pliable and easily managed. All these different sorts of people in Israel were to be suddenly cut off, chiefly by means of the sword, in one day, in a very short space of time.—The accomplishment of

of this prophecy we read, 2 Kings xvii. 18. ‘ There-
 fore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and re-
 moved them out of his sight: there was none left
 but the tribe of Judah only.’—From these verses
 I shall make one obvious remark, worthy of your at-
 tention, and it is this: The punishment here fore-
 told proceeded from Jehovah, who is affirmed to be
 the Agent by whom it was inflicted. The prophet
 saith, The Lord will cut off from Israel, &c. Though
 the Assyrians, or other nations, might be the instru-
 ments whom he employed upon this occasion, the
 Lord declares it should be his own work, by whose
 counsel, power, and providence, it was to be per-
 formed. It was the Almighty who scattered Israel,
 who sent them into a far country, and who cut them
 off. Affliction springs not out of the dust: like pro-
 motion, it comes not from the east, nor from the west,
 nor from the north, nor from the south, but from
 God; who, though his hand is often unobserved, is
 introduced here, and in many other passages of scrip-
 ture, as the Author from whom it proceeds. The
 instruments by whom we are afflicted come imme-
 diately under our view, and at them we are greatly
 displeased: whereas if we looked above them, to the
 supreme hand of God, we would more suitably ac-
 knowledge, as we ought, that the Lord maketh peace,
 and createth evil; that the Lord doth all these things;
 who is faithful in performing his threatenings, as well
 as his promises.

16 For the leaders of this people cause *them*
 to err, and *they that are* led of them, *are* de-
 stroyed.

The justice of the predicted destruction of Ephraim
 is here vindicated by the universal depravity of that
 people.—The leaders spoken of may comprehend
 two classes of men, both which possessed considerable in-
 fluence over the people; namely, those who presided

in the church, and those who governed in the state. The spiritual leaders were, the prophets, the priests, and the Levites, whose business was to instruct the people in the knowledge of the law and worship of the true God, to point out the way wherein they ought to walk, and the work they ought to do, and to go before them in the good ways of the Lord. The civil leaders were, the princes, the magistrates, and chief men, who assumed the direction of temporal affairs, whose employment ought to have been to set before them, by their authority and good conduct, patterns of righteousness and equity, of mercy and kindness, and every good work. In this manner each of these sorts of leaders would have proved substantial blessings to the community, and highly useful in promoting their best interests. Such, however, was the corruption which pervaded all ranks in Israel, that those who occupied the most important stations, are charged with perverting the designs of their office, and causing the people to err. By neglecting the faithful discharge of the duties of their office, by imprudence, unskilfulness, indolence, and voluptuousness, instead of being guides, they became destroyers of the people. By their false doctrines, and corrupt examples, they confounded the essential difference between moral good and evil, between spiritual and hypocritical worship, and taught the people to put darkness for light, and light for darkness. They led them astray from the paths of righteousness into the ways of error and sin: they made void the commandments of God by traditions, and absurd expositions, both with respect to their meaning and extent. They employed their authority not to correct prevailing errors and vices, and to reform the people; but, by their malignant influence, led them into the most criminal practices, establishing iniquity as it were by a law. What could be expected but the consequences which actually followed?

And they that are led of them are destroyed. Those who acted according to the wrong direction of their leaders, and followed their bad example, are the persons here spoken of. When treating of Chap. iii. 12. I remarked, that the Hebrew word there used, and here translated *leaders*, and *those that are led of them*, signifies, as in the margin of some of your Bibles, they that call them blessed, and they that are called blessed of them. Indeed good leaders, who preside over the people either in church or state, who act with uprightness and fidelity, are eminent blessings to the community, and effectually promote their welfare and felicity. On the contrary, leaders who cause them to err, whilst they sooth men in their transgressions, act toward them as if they were in a blessed condition; and they who are called blessed of them, assured that they are in the right way, and comforted with the pleasing prospect of complete happiness, instead of reaching the bliss they expect, are destroyed, swallowed up in utter ruin, from which they shall not escape. Thus, as the wise man saith, ‘The perverseness of transgressors destroy-
 ‘eth them *;’ whilst those who are the instruments of perverting them, destroy their own souls. It must be so, according to the maxim of Jesus Christ, ‘If the
 ‘blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch †.’—Attend then, my friends, to the counsel of Solomon:
 ‘Cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err
 ‘from the words of knowledge ‡.’ Harken to the caution given by the apostle Peter, in these words:
 ‘Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things
 ‘before, beware lest ye also being led away with the
 ‘error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfast-
 ‘ness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge
 ‘of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ‖.’

* Prov. xi. 3.
 † Peter iii. 17, 18.

† Matth. xv. 14.

‡ Prov. xix. 27.

17 Therefore the LORD shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is an hypocrite, and an evil doer, and every mouth speaketh folly: For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

The punishment merited by the crimes above mentioned is here threatened to be inflicted, and more reasons are subjoined to justify the divine procedure.—Young men are of all others the most desirable, the most vigorous and robust, the glory of their fathers, and the hope of the nation to whom they belong. When possessed of those excellent dispositions which are suited to their character and circumstances, they acquire real importance, they become the objects of the divine regard, and God is pleased to represent himself as rejoicing in their prosperity. By this prediction the scene was to be reversed; God would have no joy in those who had grievously provoked him by their sins, and who, with people of every sort in Israel, were to be the objects of his righteous vengeance.—*Neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows.* Of all persons the fatherless and widows are the most destitute and helpless, peculiarly exposed to injuries of various kinds, and often unable to procure the redress of their grievances; and, therefore, the Most High over all the earth hath declared himself their Guardian and Protector. Such, however, was the incorrigible obstinacy and pride of this people, that he would not have mercy even on those whom he commonly treated with the greatest tenderness and respect. He declares that he would not extend to them that favour and compassion, that protection and safety, that exemption from general calamities, which, on some occasions, persons of these descriptions had enjoyed. To them he would not be merciful, as he shewed himself to righteous Lot, whom he delivered from impending destruction. Few

or no exceptions were to be made, of the weakest, the tenderest, and most helpless among the people: all were to share in the common desolation, and to participate in those severe judgments in which the nation at large was to be involved. Both these expressions serve to shew the universal extent of the punishment threatened against Ephraim, which was executed by Tiglath-pilezer, whom God employed for this purpose.

For every one is a hypocrite. This expression must be understood not in its strictest sense, but with some limitation, as similar phrases must often be interpreted in scripture. It plainly denotes, that though there were some upright people in Israel, yet hypocrisy was among them an abounding and reigning iniquity. In this manner also we explain the words of the apostle Paul, who says, ‘ All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s *.’ This he affirms was the general practice; and those who were exceptions to this remark were very few, and in some measure infected with the prevailing sin of the times. A hypocrite assumes a character of which he is not possessed, and to which he hath no just pretensions: he endeavours to conceal what he is, and to appear what he is not. In external conduct he seems to be religious; in his inward dispositions he is like a sepulchre, full of putrefaction and rottenness. He professeth to know God, but in works denies him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate. With a double mind, and deceived heart, he acts a feigned part in the service of God; and, under the cloak of pretended zeal for the Lord, he artfully conceals his enmity to those very duties of which he maintains the external form.—After the hypocrite, is mentioned the *evil-doer*. I suppose the character is descriptive of those who professedly and industriously do all manner of evil against God and man. Indeed one act of

* Philip. ii. 21.

evil-doing is sufficient to incur this character, and the punishment annexed to it, as exemplified in the first transgression of angels and of man. The evil-doer here intended, is he that doth every kind of evil, who pursues it with avidity as his employment, embracing every opportunity to engage in this practice, in open contempt of the sacred authority of God, and his own best interests.

And every mouth speaketh folly. The common topics of their conversation were foolish and villanous, as the Hebrew word denotes; and the discussion of the subjects of which they discoursed, served only to possess the minds of the hearers with levity and folly. They verified the proverb which saith, ‘The mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness *,’ which proved to them a most delicious morsel. Persons of this description treat the most serious and important subjects in a frivolous, ludicrous manner, and relish most that kind of talk wherein sacred things are so represented as to excite profane mirth and jollity. They presume to speak of things of which they are incompetent judges, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.—Such were the prevailing characters, and such were the sinful practices among the people, whom God threatens to cut off. Take heed, then, and beware of hypocrisy: avoid the practice of evil-doing, and shun foolish conversation. Aim at uprightness of heart, and sincerity in conduct: endeavour after patient continuance in well-doing, and let your conversation be managed with meekness of wisdom.—The awful words with which the 12th verse was concluded are again repeated: *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* The execution of the judgments already threatened, were not sufficient to display the righteous displeasure of the Almighty against the aggravated transgressions of a sinful people. His anger

* Prov. xv. 14.

was not to be averted from them, when they had sustained the predicted calamities; but was to wax hotter, on account of their frustrating, by impenitence, the gracious design of his judgments, which were intended to lead them to repentance. Therefore his mighty arm, which stretched out the heavens, and shaketh the foundations of the world, continued still to be lifted up: his incensed justice, and his untainted holiness, called for vengeance upon those who had offered the most daring affronts to the honour of his government, and poured contempt upon his authority and admonitions.

18 ¶ For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briars and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke.

The third article in the charge brought against the Ephraimites, is, wickedness and profligacy of manners, which had arrived at a great height, and threatened to consume them.—The wickedness spoken of, may denote the most flagrant crimes, and presumptuous transgressions, proceeding from pride and obduracy of heart, and committed with a high hand, in open defiance of the authority and displeasure of the Most High. Of this wickedness there are divers sorts, each of which may be distinguished by the objects on which it terminates. When immediately directed against God, it is discovered by an absurd contempt of his providences and ordinances, his commandments, promises, and threatenings, and a virulent opposition to the interests of his kingdom and glory. When its operations are aimed against men, it is perpetrated by harassing, oppressing, and persecuting those who are entitled to acts of justice, beneficence, and charity, and by disturbing the peace and good order of human society. When it chiefly respects the persons themselves by whom it is acted, the
most

most daring iniquities are committed, forbidden by the law of nature, the law of nations, and the law of God, in order to gratify their ungovernable desires, and to promote their interest, honour, or pleasure. If you wish to know more particularly wherein wickedness consists, I refer you to a long list of crimes comprehended under this description, mentioned by the apostle Paul as works of the flesh, Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. There you will find, idolatry, adultery, murder, drunkenness, sedition, strife, and such like. Of wickedness it is affirmed,

It burneth as the fire, which consumeth all the combustible materials that are within its reach. The fire of wickedness is kindled in the heart of man, which, according to the apostle James, is set on fire of hell, and inflameth the course of nature, blazing forth in the life and conversation. Such a fire it is, that, unless the fuel is withdrawn that feeds it, and it be timeously extinguished by somewhat of an opposite quality, it will consume the person in whom it burns, with all his property. The amiable endowments of which he is possessed, the good dispositions and laudable desires with which his mind were furnished, will fall a sacrifice to its rage. It will enfeeble the understanding; it will harden the conscience, deprave the heart, hurt the memory, weaken the senses, debilitate the whole frame; it will entirely eat away peace of mind, and lead on to contention, confusion, and every evil work. It will devour the strength and vigour of the body, bring on untimely old age, and shorten the now short life of man. It will consume his honour and reputation, and leave behind it indelible marks of disgrace and reproach, that shall not be wiped away. It will burn up his riches and possessions; for by means of it a man is often brought to a piece of bread, and a nation involved in irremediable destruction.—Can a man take fire into his bosom, and not be burnt? No person will be so fool-hardy as to make the experiment with material!

rial fire. Why then will you take wickedness into your bosoms, which burneth like fire, which kindleth the wrath of God, and brings down terrible calamities upon individuals and societies? Ah! my brethren, this fire is already kindled among us; it seems to burn with increasing vehemence, and to bear a threatening aspect. I would have you immediately do what lies in your power, in dependence upon God, to stop its progress, and to allay, if you cannot extinguish, its flames. ‘Avoid the appearance of evil, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness*.’

It shall devour the briars and thorns. You know briars and thorns too well to require any description of them: they are mentioned here, as in other passages of scripture, in a figurative sense, denoting the wicked and ungodly, to whom they bear an instructive resemblance. Unless for making a fence around your fields, briars and thorns are worthless and unprofitable. The heart of the wicked, saith Solomon, is little worth, though by far the most valuable part of the man: when inflamed by wickedness, it is of no real worth or value. His lands, his possessions, his clothes, and jewels, may amount to a considerable sum; but his heart, which should be esteemed beyond them all, is worth nothing. In the words of upright Job, ‘They are vile than the earth †.’ Like briars and thorns, the wicked are hurtful and dangerous. On this account the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, who remained among the Israelites, were foretold ‘to be pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides.’ In allusion to this circumstance, God promises by the prophet Ezekiel, ‘There shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them that despised them, and they shall know that I am the Lord God ‡.’ The sharpness of their words,

* 1 Tim. vi. 11. † Job xxx. 8. ‡ Ezek. xxviii. 24.

and their proneness to catch hold of men and injure them, fully vindicate the figurative language before us, though we could trace no other resemblance. It deserves, however, farther to be remarked, that briars and thorns never change their nature, though they may be cultivated with the greatest care, and their situation altered. In like manner, wicked men, wherever they are placed, in the city or in the country, in the court or in the church, still retain their wickedness, and discover the depravity of their nature. Once more, as thorns and briars serve for fuel to the fire, so our Lord hath instructed us, that those who abide not in him, shall be cast forth as branches, and thrown into the fire, where they are burnt. ‘The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*.’ Thus the fire of wickedness shall devour those who are figuratively spoken of as briars and thorns.

And shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. The people of Ephraim are here represented by the beautiful figure of a forest, on account of their vast numbers, and great variety of conditions, some of them being elevated to distinguished eminence, whilst others were less conspicuous, and lost as it were among the multitude. By the thickets of the forest, may be meant the most populous parts of the kingdom, that abounded with inhabitants of every description. There probably the fire of wickedness had burnt with the greatest vehemence, and there its direful effects were to be felt in the highest degree. The idolatry and contempt of the word of the Lord, the rapine and oppression, and similar complicated crimes, which prevailed among all ranks of men, should kindle among them a prodigious flame, from which smoke should arise that might be seen far and near. The expression seems intended to exhibit an affecting re-

* Psa. ix. 17.

presentation of the displeasure of almighty God, the general devastation which should be made among the people, and the consequent darkness that was thereupon to ensue.—I conclude this article with the words of the apostle Paul, writing to the churches of Galatia: ‘ If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh *.’

19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fewel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother.

The punishment which was soon to follow the wickedness committed by the people of Ephraim is here denounced.—Wrath is not a passion in God as in man; who is thereby greatly agitated, and apt to act improperly, through the influence of the emotions which he feels: it only denotes, that whilst the Most High possesseth the most perfect serenity, in his dispensations toward men, he, in some measure, acts like a person highly displeased with the insults he hath received from those who ought to have honoured and obeyed him. On this account, and in accommodation to the weakness of our capacities, wrath is often ascribed to God in scripture, and particularly in this verse, signifying the awful effects of the divine righteousness and justice, when employed in vindicating the glory of his name, and the honour of his government; in displaying his indignation against sin, and punishing transgressors. By the abounding wickedness of Ephraim, and the terrible effects of the divine displeasure manifested against them, the light they formerly enjoyed was to be greatly obscured; their minds darkened through ignorance, prejudice,

* Gal. v. 15, 16.

and vice; and their land to become a dreadful scene of calamity and distress, in which the inhabitants were to be involved. In the prophetic writings, light is often used in a metaphorical sense, to denote a prosperous condition; and darkness, to set forth a state of affliction and misery. Accordingly the prophet Joel thus describes the day of the Lord, which he declared was nigh at hand: ‘A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness*.’ In this figurative sense, I apprehend, the darkness spoken of in this passage is to be understood, signifying the great adversity, trouble, and perplexity, with which the land of the ten tribes should be filled.

And the people shall be as the fuel of the fire. Fuel, you know, is the combustible materials which are laid upon the fire to keep it burning, whilst at the same time they are consumed. The wicked and ungodly Ephraimites were to be as fuel to the wrath of the Lord of hosts, which they were the instruments of kindling and increasing: they were thereby to be consumed and destroyed. In the execution of this threatening, the law of retaliation was strictly observed. According to the rules of justice and equity, the subjects of this prediction, who, in open defiance of the authority and judgments of God, had lighted up the fire of wickedness, should be made fuel to the fire of divine wrath.—*No man shall spare his brother.* One gracious design of the great Creator in connecting mankind together, by the intimate relation of brethren and friends, seems to have been, to induce them to assist and relieve each other in times of danger and distress. How deplorable then the condition of the Ephraimites, when no man was to spare his brother; when those who were nearly related, and ought to have helped each other, laying aside natural affection, to gratify their hatred, re-

* Joel ii. 2.

venge, and other malevolent passions, sacrificed their brother to their malice and rage!—Permit me, from this subject, to inculcate brotherly kindness upon you, my friends. Be not like the men of Ephraim: spare your brother; not only those to whom you are related, and with whom you live in society, but all those with whom you are partakers of the same human nature. Spare your brother: spare his reputation, his liberty and property, and lend him your friendly aid as his necessities require. Be kindly affectionate one to another, in honour preferring one another. If this is not a natural inference, it is a salutary advice.

20 And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm.

In this and the following verse, the subject which was introduced in the preceding one is continued and illustrated.—For this purpose, the prophet gives a figurative description of the famishing condition to which the people of Ephraim should be reduced by the horrors of war. Distressed with want of the necessaries of life, every one should greedily grasp on the right hand at such provisions as he could lay hold on, to be the means of his support. Having done this, still he was to remain hungry, destitute of what was sufficient to allay the cravings of nature.—*And he shall eat on the left hand.* His urgent necessities not being supplied, he should devour with eagerness whatever food he could get from any quarter, on the left as well as the right hand. Notwithstanding his repeated efforts, *they shall not be satisfied.* This disagreeable circumstance may be considered both as their sin and their punishment. Their desires were insatiable; and the consequence was, that the desires which they felt could not be gratified. ‘The righteous (saith
‘ Solomon)

‘ Solomon) eateth to the satisfying of his soul*.’ Though sometimes they may not have enough to fill their appetite, they are content with what divine providence hath allotted them, and bless God for what they enjoy. Whereas ‘ the belly of the wicked shall want:’ his desire shall not be satisfied; nor the necessities of which he complaineth relieved, so as to afford him contentment.—If you would eat and be satisfied with the meek of the earth, look upon the provision you receive as the gift of a kind Father, as procured for you by the mediation of your Saviour, as the happy effect of your honest industry, and be solicitous to enjoy with it the divine favour and blessing.

They shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm. I suppose these words are not to be literally explained. To understand their meaning, you must recollect, that a nation is sometimes spoken of as a person constituted of a soul, and the various parts of a human body. The spirit by which the nation is actuated, and the maxims by which their conduct is governed, is to be considered as the soul, and the people at large as the body. In this political body there are those who act the part of the arms, by whom its strength is exerted, and its safety preserved. On this principle I explain this prediction, they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm. Every one almost was to be employed in cruelly harassing and devouring those whose business it was to support and defend the interests of the nation. Unmindful of the laws of nature, the ties of friendship and gratitude, they would vex and destroy those useful members of the community with whom they were nearly connected, and to whom they were obliged for their efforts in their behalf. This exposition I have adopted, that you might not injuriously imagine that the Ephraimites were men-eaters, and actually devoured their own flesh in time of scarcity and famine; and I doubt not but I have given you the true in-

* Prov. xiii. 25.

terpretation of the prophecy.—Knowing the terror of the Lord, displayed in the terrible judgments he hath executed, we persuade you to remember what God hath threatened to inflict upon transgressors, as well as to believe what he hath promised to bestow upon the faithful. Meditation upon the treasures of his wrath is no less necessary and useful than the contemplation of the riches of his mercy and grace. Seriously consider, then, not only what God can do for you, and bestow upon you, but what he can do against you, and take away from you.

21 Manasseh, Ephraim ; and Ephraim, Manasseh: *and* they together *shall be* against Judah : For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.

These words foretel the discord and confusion which was to be every where conspicuous among the posterity of Abraham at the time to which this prediction refers.—Manasseh, you know, was the name that the patriarch Joseph gave to his eldest son, and Ephraim was the name he gave to the younger ; upon whom, before his death, he laid his right hand, and thereby gave him precedence to Manasseh. These names were afterward given to two of the tribes of Israel, whose possessions lay contiguous to each other ; and whose numbers were very considerable, when the sum was taken of all the congregation of Israel, from twenty years old and upward. In the tribe of Manasseh were found above thirty-two thousand, and in Ephraim more than forty thousand. Between these two neighbouring tribes, and between them and their brethren in Judah, there were to arise those dangerous animosities, and that bitter contention and strife, which are a great calamity, and a great curse. According to the maxim of Jesus Christ, the greatest and most powerful kingdoms when divided against themselves cannot stand. Read with attention the
aphorism

aphorism itself, recorded Mark iii. 24. ‘ If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.’ Union gives strength and firmness to those societies which, viewed individually, are but weak in themselves: it communicates order and stability to things which, separately considered, are destitute of these advantages: it establishes harmony and peace among those who are connected together by the strongest ties. But when union and good agreement among kingdoms are interrupted, one nation injures and assists in destroying another. Manasseh envies and devours Ephraim; Ephraim envies and consumes Manasseh; and both rise up in hostility against Judah. Such unnatural contention and discord were to prevail among the divided posterity of Israel, as the just punishment of their many atrocious transgressions committed against the Lord.—This prediction seems to have been fulfilled about the time that Hoshea, the son of Elah, formed a conspiracy against Pekah, the king of Israel, whom he slew, and reigned in his stead; of which you read in 2 Kings xv. 30. Notwithstanding these heavy judgments were inflicted upon the Ephraimites, our prophet again repeats the awful declaration, *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still*; and, therefore, more and greater calamities were yet to be expected.—Since discord, and acts of hostility, among the tribes of Jacob, are here foretold as severe judgments, suffer me to recommend to you the cultivation of unity, love, and peace among yourselves. Divisions and contentions, with their fatal attendants, consume the very vitals of Christianity, blast its precious fruits, and counteract its benevolent designs; whereas union of affection, good agreement, and mutual kind offices, will pave the way for you to behold and experience how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Then, comfortable thought! the God of peace shall be with you.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE prophet, after finishing the section of his discourse, which comprehends the first four verses of this chapter, wherein he charges the Ephraimites with iniquity and injustice, and represents the punishment which on that account was to be inflicted upon them—proceeds, at the 5th verse, to foretel the remarkable judgment whereby the Almighty had determined to punish the pride and arrogance of the king of Assyria, who, having vanquished the Ephraimites, thought of invading Judea and Jerusalem, and extirpating the religion of the Jews, as he had done that of the other nations whom he conquered. To chastize that haughty monarch for this insolent project, and to comfort the dejected minds of the godly, who were greatly alarmed at the growing empire of Assyria, Isaiah is directed to declare, that that powerful kingdom should be overthrown by the immediate hand of God, without human aid, and the people of the Most High should justly ascribe the praises of that great event to a wonderful divine interposition. The Jewish nation, however, having become very corrupt, were not to pass unpunished for their sins, though the severity of the calamities to which they were to be subjected, was to be mixed with much mercy and favour.—This prophetic discourse begins with setting forth the reasons for which God permitted the Assyrians to act in hostility against his people; namely, that he might punish their hypocrisy, that he might purify his church, and afterward punish the kings of Assyria for the crimes they committed in the execution of this work, ver. 5.—13. It then exhibits some strong proofs of the pride of Assyria, which required to be checked; with a more full description of the divine judgments which were to be executed upon them, ver. 13.—20.—After which is represented the more improved

proved state of the church of God among the Jews, in consequence of the various afflictions brought upon them by means of the Assyrians, ver. 20.—24. The prophet next proceeds to apply the above prediction, concerning the downfall of Assyria, for the consolation of the people of God, ver. 24.—28. He then concludes with a particular description of some circumstances with which the expedition of the Assyrian monarch against Judea was to be attended, ver. 28. to the end of the chapter.

C H A P. X.

WO unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness *which* they have prescribed.

The charge of iniquity and injustice is here laid against the Ephraimites upon a double account.—First, They decreed unrighteous decrees. The word translated *decree*, is derived from one that signifies *to write* or *engrave*; and statutes being commonly written, it is used to express a decree which hath the authority of a law, and is therefore engrossed for preservation in some permanent record. The decrees here mentioned were unrighteous. The persons who enacted them had arrived at such audacity in the practice of injustice, that they not only gave orders to those over whom they had influence to do things that were wicked, but, establishing iniquity by law, they caused their edicts to be recorded as public evidences of their violence and oppression. The princes exacted of the people the most unjust and intolerable burdens, to which they had no right; and, therefore, God gave them this salutary advice,

by the prophet Ezekiel: ‘ Thus saith the Lord God, ‘ Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, ‘ take away your exactions from my people, saith the ‘ Lord God *.’ The rich and the great injured the poor and needy; and, on that account, God thus addressed them by the prophet Micah: ‘ For the rich ‘ men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants ‘ thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth †.’ The priests also framed unrighteous decrees, which, with their foolish inventions and vain traditions, they substituted in the room of the law of God, which they corrupted by their false glosses and forced interpretations. Hence the heavy charge contained in Zeph. iii. 4. ‘ Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: ‘ her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have ‘ done violence to the law.’ Thus unrighteousness filled the land, the city, and the sanctuary: it received the sanction of those in authority, and pervaded all ranks of the people.—Secondly, Their sin also consisted in this,

They write grievousness which they have prescribed. The sins of Ephraim, which received countenance and support from those in power, and abounded among the people, included in this article of the charge, seem to have been such as the following: They over-reached and took advantage of one another in their daily intercourse and transactions in business: they withheld from others what was their unquestionable right; such as the wages of the hireling, and that which belonged to the poor and stranger: they imposed upon the lower ranks of the people those heavy burdens which they were unable to sustain: they delayed and perverted the execution of justice and judgment in those instances wherein the poor and the helpless were concerned. By pre-

* Ezek. xlv. 9.

† Micah vi. 12.

scribing and practising these and the like enormous sins, they clearly shewed, that they were destitute of the fear of God, that they had no regard to righteousness, and were indifferent to the divine displeasure which they had awakened. The commission of such crimes is truly grievous; but the writing and prescribing of them, by which they acquired a kind of sanction from abused authority, is indeed grievousness itself.—Against persons guilty of such flagrant acts of wickedness, wo, or complicated misery, is denounced. Those who enact unrighteous decrees, and require what is truly oppressive and grievous, however elevated their station, and sanguine their hopes of impunity, shall assuredly know, that he who loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity, will recompense them according to their works.—What the apostle Paul saith with respect to some other sins, I say to you in reference to those now mentioned, ‘ Let them not be once named among you, as becometh saints *.’

2 To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and *that* they may rob the fatherless.

The wicked design of these unrighteous decrees is particularly specified in this verse.—The poor and needy of God’s people were maltreated by those who ought to have vindicated and supported them. Among persons of this description, there are some who are so very poor, that they have nothing to lose, and so very needy, that they have hardly any thing of which injustice can lay hold. They have neither bread to eat, nor raiment to put on. There are others who have some little property, and who enjoy so much as serves merely to preserve them from abject poverty,

* Eph. v. 3.

and to supply present urgent necessities. Both these conditions give rise oft-times to solicitude and dejection; and, therefore, people of this sort should be the objects of sympathy and compassion to those who are in any measure able to assist and relieve them. They are weak and helpless, and often with great difficulty procure assistance in the extremity of their need; and, therefore, they are described as those 'who have no help *.' On this account, among others, God, who is gracious, hath recommended them to the care and patronage of those who are in opulence and power, whilst he hath taken them in a special manner into his own protection, and engaged himself to be their defence. The poor, of the last mentioned class, seem here to be chiefly intended, whom those invested with authority among the Ephraimites, are said to turn aside from judgment, and to take away the right. Both expressions seem to be of the same import, the one serving to illustrate and explain the other. The judgment which was perverted, consisted of the right which, according to the rule of equity, those that were in indigent circumstances had acquired to their possessions, in which they justly expected they should have been protected by those in superior station. This judgment, however, was turned aside from its proper channel: its course was retarded or stopped; and thus the poor were either deprived of their right, or the determination of the causes wherein they were concerned were unnecessarily delayed, which is sometimes no less a hardship than unjust decisions. This is indeed a very great and aggravated crime. To turn aside the rich from judgment, and to take away the right of those who are in affluence, is a sin of very considerable magnitude; but to act in this manner toward the poor, is still a greater transgression. To deprive of judgment and right those to whom we are obliged not

* Psa. lxxii. 12.

only to do justice, but to give liberally for their support; to refuse to do justice to those to whom we are commanded to be charitable, to take away from him who is in want, to trample upon the rights of those who with difficulty can obtain redress, and to injure those who are unable to resist, yea, perhaps, dare not complain, must be the most complicated wickedness: especially if we consider, that by taking away the right of the poor, God himself is deprived of the grateful homage and praise which is due to him by people of this description, for the seasonable assistance they receive, by the faithful performance of the promises which are the ground of their hope and trust.

That widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. The widow and the fatherless are commonly the most friendless and helpless class of mankind, and being most exposed to injuries and oppression, their interests, with those of the poor and needy, ought to be patronised and supported by persons in authority. How odious and enormous the crime of the rulers of Ephraim, who acted toward the widows as the rapacious beasts of the field toward those that are weak and defenceless, seizing upon them, and greedily devouring them as their prey, feasting upon their spoils, rejoicing in their misery, making themselves merry with their sorrow, and rich with their property!—And that they may rob the fatherless, by violently depriving them of their just rights, whom they ought carefully to have protected in the enjoyment of them. How daring is this iniquity, impudently committed in open defiance of these and similar divine prohibitions! ‘Enter not into the fields of the fatherless.’ Enter them not in a forcible manner, to take from them with violence that which is their right and property. Do you inquire, Is it more dangerous to enter their fields than the fields of other persons? By this order the least permission is not given to injure the grounds of any person

person whatever ; but a special caution is administered, to beware of hurting those whom God hath engaged to relieve and protect. The reason is subjoined in these words : ‘ For their Redeemer is mighty ; he shall plead their cause with thee *.’ Though the widow and the fatherless may be unable to plead their own cause, and to vindicate their own rights, and though they may be destitute of friends to patronise them, the almighty Redeemer will support their interests, and effectually plead against those who wickedly injure them. ‘ Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me : I will surely hear their cry ; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless †.’ Notwithstanding the many instructive admonitions which God hath delivered upon this subject, persons in power among the Ephraimites perpetrated the most flagitious crimes, in their conduct toward the widow and fatherless, with which they are here charged.—To what I have said on this head upon former occasions, I hope I need add nothing farther at present.

3 And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation *which* shall come from far ? to whom will ye flee for help ? and where will ye leave your glory ?

The righteous judgment which God was about to inflict, on account of the above-mentioned wickedness, is represented in this and the following verse, wherein the condition of these transgressors is described as truly helpless and deplorable.—As they had taken pleasure in trampling upon the sacred rights of the weak and defenceless among their brethren, so God, in punishing

* Prov. xxiii. 11.

† Exod. xxii. 22, 23, 24.

them for their fins, would lay them desolate, and they, in their turn, should have none to defend them from the hostile attacks to which they were to be exposed. In scripture-style, the season in which God is pleased to draw near to a person or people, that he may accomplish various important purposes, is called a Day of visitation. Sometimes his visitation is intended to afford deliverance and consolation to the oppressed, by extricating them from servitude and misery, and introducing them into a happy and comfortable condition. In this sense the Lord is said to have visited his people Israel, when he delivered them from Egyptian bondage * ; and to have visited and redeemed his people, when he bestowed upon them the greatest mercy †. Sometimes it is designed to manifest his tender care and constant inspection of his people, over whom he exerciseth the most vigilant attention, that he may effectually promote their best interests. With this view, he declares, that ‘ if his children
 ‘ shall break his statutes, and keep not his command-
 ‘ ments, then will he visit their transgression with the
 ‘ rod, and their iniquity with stripes ‡.’ Such times are indeed days of visitation, wherein God sensibly draws near with the proofs of his kindness and favour, which he most undeservedly confers; and in which he appears with his rod of correction, that he may administer necessary chastisements, and restore those who had forsaken his law from their wanderings. At other times, God visits those who have not profited by the many warnings they have received, nor repented of the sins they have committed, notwithstanding the repeated corrections that he hath administered, to execute upon them desolating judgments and terrible vengeance. Hence he thus speaks, by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘ Shall I
 ‘ not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and
 ‘ shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as

* Exod. iv. 31.

† Luke i. 68.

‡ Psal. lxxxix. 32.

‘ this?’

‘ this *?’ In this last sense, I suppose, the day of visitation is here meant, denoting that awful period wherein God was about to punish the presumptuous sinners of Ephraim, when he would appear in the most formidable manner, to avenge their unrighteous decrees, and unmerciful dealings with the poor and helpless.—In such a season, the prophet inquires, What will ye do? Permit me to put this question to you, my brethren. What will ye do in the day of visitation? It is of much higher importance to have a proper answer prepared to this inquiry, than to have the question itself illustrated. The eventful day is fast approaching, when God will visit you not with mercies, and gentle corrections, as he is now doing, but with terrible things in righteousness, which it may be you look not for. What will ye then do? What bitter anguish, and confused horror, will then seize upon multitudes! You may flatter yourselves now in your iniquities, and endeavour to palliate your sins by various excuses. But then, O man! thou wilt be inexcusable, and shalt not escape the righteous judgment of God. If you are so foolish as reject the relief offered you in the gospel, and neglect to flee to the hiding-place which infinite mercy hath provided, like the man in the parable, you shall be speechless and confounded.

And in the desolation that shall come from far. The Hebrew word translated *desolation*, signifies such a terrible commotion as is suddenly raised in the sea by a great storm, when the waves dash violently against one another with a hideous noise. This affords a just emblem of the disturbance and confusion which was to be excited, by the report of a powerful enemy rapidly advancing with a view to invade and desolate the country of Ephraim, by whom the cities were to be laid waste, the houses demolished, the fields and vineyards laid open, and the inhabitants

* Jer. v. 9.

killed or stripped of their most valuable effects. In room of the greatest affluence, scarcity and want were to prevail; in place of tranquillity and security, dread and terror were to be experienced; and instead of the wine of grapes, and the oil of olives, the people were to drink the wine of astonishment.—This dreadful storm, which was to be attended with general desolation, was to come from far. It would not take rise from any of the neighbouring nations with whom Ephraim was surrounded; for being in league with Syria, which was one of their most powerful neighbours, they had nothing to fear from the kingdoms that were situated near them. The prophet therefore informs them, that the assault by which they were to be laid waste, was to come from a great distance, from Assyria and Babylon, though for wise reasons their names were not now mentioned. These kingdoms lay far to the northward of the land of Israel: for when Isaiah inquired of Hezekiah, king of Judah, From whence came these men, who brought him letters, and a present, on his recovery from sickness, he received for answer, ‘They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon*.’—In the certain prospect of the threatened desolation, the prophet very properly inquires,

To whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Assistance you will then greatly need; and, therefore, you ought timeously to consider to whom you may apply with hopes of success. In vain shall you look for safety to the hills and the multitude of mountains; in vain shall you seek help from men, if God be your enemy; in vain shall you invoke the aid of the Egyptians; in vain shall you trust to your own strength as means of defence; in vain shall you expect the divine interposition and deliverance, without which your whole country and possessions shall become a prey to the hostile attacks

* Isaiah xxxix. 3.

of your enemies. Where then will ye flee for help? From what quarter can you hope to obtain relief, in the time of the approaching desolation, and threatened storm of divine wrath? As the indigent and helpless implored your assistance in vain, so you shall seek that help and relief from others which you shall not obtain; in consequence of which you shall be covered with shame and disappointment, and lie at the mercy of your conquering enemies.—*And where will ye leave your glory?* The glory of Ephraim consisted of their religion and liberty, their property and strength as a nation, with all those privileges which added to their splendour and importance, whereof people are prone to boast and triumph. In such things as these, men are apt to confide and glory: hence these memorable words delivered by the prophet Jeremiah; ‘ Thus saith the Lord, Let not the
 ‘ wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty
 ‘ man glory in his might, let not the rich man glo-
 ‘ ry in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory
 ‘ in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that
 ‘ I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judg-
 ‘ ment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these
 ‘ things I delight, saith the Lord *.’ The glory concerning which our prophet inquires, might also comprehend in it the children of Ephraim, who were the crown and glory of their fathers. According to the faithful promise of God, that people were exceedingly fruitful, and their children were greatly multiplied; and, in the prospect of desolation, it became them seriously to consider where they would leave their children, and all those prerogatives of which they gloried. As the prophet Hosea foretold, ‘ Their glory shall flee
 ‘ away as a bird,’ when God would visit their sins; yea, he adds, ‘ Wo unto them when I depart from
 ‘ them †.’—Transgressors ought seriously to catechise themselves on the subjects here mentioned, in the

* Jer. ix. 23, 24.

† Hosea ix. 11, 12.

prospect of the day of visitation, and the desolation that shall come from far. What will ye do, when God will call you to account for the improvement you have made of the talents with which you are intrusted? Where will ye flee, when God shall arise to judgment, and his wrath shall be revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men? Where will ye flee for help, when God will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place? Where will ye leave your glory, when the day of the Lord, that you have put far away, shall overtake you as a thief in the night? Make answer to these inquiries at the tribunal of conscience, as you would not be ashamed at the coming of the Son of God.

4 Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain: For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand *is* stretched out still.

In these words the Lord, by our prophet, represents the deplorable condition to which those guilty of the crimes above mentioned should be reduced.— Almighty God, in whose name Isaiah delivered this prediction, is doubtless the Person without whom, destitute of whose merciful interposition and presence, what is foretold in the following words should certainly come to pass. Without his necessary aid and protection, they shall be taken captive by those who are themselves in captivity; they shall be subdued by those who are themselves vanquished. *They shall bow down under the prisoners.* Bound with chains, and sent into places of confinement, they shall be obliged to bow down among their fellow-prisoners, through the weight of the fetters wherewith they were fastened, or the low roof of the place in which they were to be confined. Or the expres-
sion

sion may refer to the hard bondage in which they should be employed during their captivity, when they were to be compelled to bow down to the yoke of their oppressors like beasts of burden.—*And they shall fall under the slain, or among the slain, who were to be killed, in the day of visitation, by the powerful nation who was to invade and desolate the land of Israel.* Either a miserable captivity, or a violent death, should be the punishment of those presumptuous transgressors to whom this prediction was delivered.—*For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* Notwithstanding these dreadful threatenings of divine judgments to be executed upon this treacherous people, still greater calamities awaited them, which God, whom they had grievously offended, would afterward inflict upon them as the just punishment of their crimes.—This prophecy seems to have been accomplished by the calamities inflicted upon the Ephraimites by Tiglath-pilezer, when many of them were slain in battle, and great numbers were taken captive into foreign countries, where they were employed in the most wretched servitude.—Hence we learn what we ought never to forget, that there is no Saviour beside God; no deliverance to be obtained without him, who commandeth deliverance for Jacob; no safety to be enjoyed but in the care and protection of his divine providence. Convinced of this important truth, let us take heed that we live not without him in the world, destitute of his fear and love, indifferent to his favour and approbation, without whom we must be miserable, and by whom alone we can be preserved in peace and safety.

5 ¶ O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.

Here begins the fourth section of our prophet's discourse, which contains a new and distinct prophecy.—

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The prophet, having denounced the righteous judgments of God against Ephraim and Syria, who intended, with their united strength, to attack Judea, proceeds to address the Assyrians, who were to be instruments of executing the divine vengeance upon these confederate nations. He introduces the Assyrian monarch glorying in his former victories, boasting of his power and forces, and elated with pride, in the prospect he entertained of vanquishing Judah, and occupying the city of Jerusalem, in open defiance of the God of Israel. He therefore reproves his temerity and folly, represses the daring insolence of this haughty prince, informing him, that however ostentatiously he boasted of his armies and successes, he could neither move nor act unless by the direction of divine providence, nor execute any design in opposition to the purposes and counsels of God.—The Assyrian to whom our prophet especially directs his discourse, was the monarch of that great empire, particularly Sennacherib, that powerful, ambitious, and haughty prince, as will more fully appear in our progress through this prophetic oration. Of this great king, Isaiah gives no flattering description, nor does he ascribe to him eminent abilities; but represents him merely as *the rod of God's anger*, the instrument wherewith the Almighty, who was highly offended at his people, would chastize and punish them, all whose motions depended entirely upon his pleasure, were the effect of his power, and directed by his wisdom. By this figure the Assyrian is exhibited in a just point of view, utterly incapable, without God, of doing any thing, much less of performing the work in which he was to be employed, of chastizing a hypocritical nation for their sins. He is therefore emphatically designed the rod of God's anger; who being greatly incensed against Ephraim, on account of their many aggravated iniquities, was about to correct them severely in his just displeasure.—In the following clause of the verse, the same sentiment is illustrated

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ed and explained, where the Assyrian is thus described :

And the staff in their hand is mine indignation ; or, according to the Bishop of London's new translation, " The staff in whose hand is the instrument of mine indignation." The difficulty that occurs here does not seem to be so great as some have imagined. The former version, in our Bibles, represents the divine indignation as the staff which supported Assyria in performing the work assigned them, whilst the latter version exhibits them as the staff which God would employ to express his indignation against Israel. The staff here mentioned may allude to the instrument called by that name, used by the officers of justice, for punishing transgressors of the laws, according to the appointment of the judges, who, in this manner, testify their just displeasure against the criminal, and their abhorrence of his crime. In allusion to this practice, Assyria is called the staff of God's indignation, whereby he was to punish those who, by their complicated wickedness, had incurred his displeasure, whom he was about to chastize not merely as a father, but as a judge. They were to experience the painful effects of the severe, though necessary correction of the indignant Sovereign of the Universe, whom they had highly offended by their egregious folly, and perverse obstinacy.—What a grand idea does the representation here given of Assyria convey of the power and glory of Jehovah, the supreme Ruler and righteous Governor of the world ! He disposeth of the kingdoms of this earth as seemeth good in his sight : the most powerful princes are subject to his authority : all of them are his servants : to one he saith, Come, and he cometh ; to another, Go, and he goeth. In the words of our prophet, he hisseth for the fly of Egypt, and the bee of Assyria ; and, by a secret impulse, and invisible power, he effectually determines them to execute his pleasure. The king of Assyria, though a great potentate among men, the
terror

terror and scourge of neighbouring nations, in the hand of the Almighty, was nothing more than a rod or staff. With what profound veneration and reverence then ought we to serve this mighty Lord, whose kingdom ruleth over all.

6 I will fend him against an hypocritical nation; and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

These words mark the occasion on which the Assyrian monarch would signally display his pride, arrogance, and ambition; namely, when he had in prospect the conquest of Ephraim, in the view of which he seems to have greatly exulted.—*I will fend him* (saith God); *I will give him a charge*. This declaration, the meaning of which it is easy to understand, must be explained in consistency with the pure and perfect nature of Jehovah, who can never require of men any thing that is sinful or unjust. Though pride, and the lust of power and conquest, may direct the counsels and efforts of princes, who have in view no higher end than to gratify their own corrupt dispositions, yet there is not any thing more clear and certain, than that all their wicked designs proceed wholly from themselves, and not from God, who, by the powerful influence of his providence, over-rules their arrogance and ambition, so as to subserve his own wise and gracious purposes. He so directs their enterprises, and orders events, that they shall be the instruments of executing determined judgments upon the wicked, and of manifesting the divine glory in their punishment. When, therefore, the prophet affirms, in the name of the Most High, I will fend him, I will give him a charge, he plainly declares, that God, in perfect consistency with the holiness of his nature,

nature, and the rectitude of his administration, would effectually dispose the king of Assyria fully to execute the work which he was about to assign him.

Against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath. The nation intended was Ephraim, which, in the preceding prophetic discourse, was charged with hypocrisy, and against whom was kindled the anger of the Lord, who was soon to punish them by means of the Assyrian. Though that highly favoured people professed to know God, in works they denied him, having become abominable, and to every good work reprobate. With the instituted worship of the true God, they mixed the idolatrous rites of surrounding nations, the foolish superstitions of human invention, and the vain traditions of elders. Their affections were divided between God and the world: their hearts were not right with God, nor found in his statutes: their religion was a heterogeneous mixture of what is true and false: their profession was contradicted by their practice: in this manner they endeavoured to deceive themselves and others; and provoked the indignation of that God who will not be mocked, and who hates deceitful as well as bloody men.—On this account they are farther described as the people of God's wrath, against whom his just displeasure was to be directed, and on whom it should fall with a crushing weight. Their multiplied transgressions, in which they obstinately persisted, rendered them the just objects of God's wrath and righteous vengeance. Therefore he was to send the Assyrian,

To take the spoil, and to take the prey. The spoil and the prey may include all the portable and valuable effects that belonged to the people of Ephraim; such as their corn, wine, and oil, their jewels, furniture, and clothes, with various articles of merchandise. All these the Assyrian, with his army, were greedily to seize, and to carry away with them. As for their houses, estates, and cities, which were

not moveable, these they would demolish and destroy to the utmost of their power. The expression being repeated with little variation, seems to intimate, that the Assyrian should certainly and thoroughly perform this service upon which he was to be sent.—*And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.* These words express the sovereign contempt with which the enemies of Ephraim should treat them, and the complete conquest they were to obtain over them, with their utter inability to make any effectual resistance to their power and progress. They intimate the ignominy and disgraceful condition to which the Ephraimites were to be reduced, when they themselves, with all that they esteemed dear and valuable, were to be trampled upon as the mire of the streets.—Let us hearken to the voice of the rod of God's anger, and receive instruction from the staff of his indignation, with which he chastized a hypocritical nation. Though the words here recorded were spoken by Isaiah, the voice is the Lord's, and the language is that of the rod. It loudly proclaims the power, righteousness, and holiness of Jehovah: it plainly declares the folly, wickedness, treachery, and ingratitude of men; and clearly announces their consequent danger, guilt, and misery. The rod cries to us, *Repent*, as it did of old in the gates of Nineveh, whose inhabitants hearkened to the admonition, understood its meaning, and repented in dust and ashes. It cries to us also for that righteousness and mercy which exalteth a nation, and preserves them from ruin, when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. We do not learn unless we are taught: and the rod is sent to teach us those lessons to which we are inattentive in prosperity; such as to fear God whom we have offended, to worship him whom we have neglected, to be obedient to his laws which we have contemned, to make restitution to those we have injured, to be charitable to those we have censured and despised. From the rod of God's anger, let us learn

these salutary instructions; and then shall we have cause to say, with the royal poet, ‘Blessed is the man
‘whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him
‘out of thy law*.’

7 Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither *doth* his heart think so; but *it is* in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few.

The prophet here shows that the Assyrian should entertain very different designs, in his expedition against Ephraim, from those which God had in view in sending him against that hypocritical nation.—The Assyrian meant to gratify his boundless ambition, and lust of exorbitant power and conquest; and, therefore, laying aside all regard to humanity and equity, he implicitly followed the dictates of that intolerable pride and arrogance which seem to have been the predominant dispositions under which he acted. The design for which God employed him to take the spoil of Israel, and to reduce them to a state of abject servitude and captivity, was to display his own glory, to punish the aggravated sins of his people, that they might feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from the Lord, that, under a humbling sense of their guilt and danger, a remnant of them might be engaged to return to the true God, their duty, and happiness. The Assyrian had not the least intention of promoting these important purposes which the God of the spirits of all flesh had in view to accomplish.—*But it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few.* He meditated the execution of designs suggested by insatiable ambition, avarice, and cruelty, and the other bad dispositions whereby his mind was agitated and distracted. He thought of enlarging his dominions, and extending his conquests, not by humanity, clemency, and equity, which might have in-

* Psal. xciv. 12.

duced neighbouring nations to resort to his standard, and submit to his government; but, in open contempt of these virtues, by which human society is preserved, he meant to effectuate his plan of operation by inhumanity, rapacity, and cruelty. His heart was bent upon the destruction of nations, that, upon their ruins, he might enlarge his own empire. His mind was set upon plundering them of their riches, laying waste their fields, burning their cities, and spreading among the vanquished, slaughter, captivity, and bondage, with every other misery mankind are capable of sustaining, that, in this manner, he might extend the terror of his arms, and the greatness of his power.—The truth contained in this verse is often exemplified by those whom God employs to execute his purposes, who, in many instances, form to themselves designs very different from those intended by divine wisdom. Thus it was with Cyrus, who did not know God, though he furnished, and strengthened him to subdue nations before him; and thus it is with those powers whose hearts God hath inclined to fulfil his will, and to agree, to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled*. Than this, however, there is not any thing that they less meditated and intended. Aware then of the sin and danger of acting for other ends than those God hath required us to keep in view, and solicitous to attain the high honour of being workers together with him, let us diligently study the mind of the Lord, and uniformly endeavour to advance the great purposes he employs us to promote.

8 For he saith, *Are not my princes altogether kings?*

The king of Assyria is here introduced clothed with pride, vainly boasting of the greatness of his majesty,

* Rev. xvii. 17.

and the extent of his empire.—Having conquered various kingdoms that possessed regal power, such as Media, Babylon, and Syria, he divided them into provinces, and committed the administration of the government to those who were called Princes, whose office it was to preside over the affairs of the district committed to their care, under the supreme authority of the Assyrian monarch, who was therefore called the Great King. Of these princes he boasts, that they were altogether kings. Certainly that person is not altogether a king, who hath an earthly superior, to whom he is obliged to submit, and to whom he is amenable for his conduct. If then the princes, of whom the Assyrian exultingly speaks, were obliged to obey him, and to render an account of their administration when required, it is obvious that he foolishly attributed too much to them, and magnified their grandeur far beyond the truth. Thus it often happens to proud ambitious men, when extolling their imaginary greatness, they discover the most ridiculous vanity, and fall into downright absurdities.—By the instance before us, you ought to be warned to avoid extravagant ostentatious boasting, which cannot possibly serve any good purpose, remembering, that he that is lifted up, his soul is not upright in him. They who speak highly of themselves, commonly think themselves to be much higher than indeed they are. Let us adopt the wise resolution of the apostle Paul, which is thus expressed: ‘ We will not boast of things
‘ without measure, but according to the measure of
‘ the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure
‘ to reach even unto you *.’

9 *Is* not Calno, as Carchemish? *is* not Hamath, as Arpad? *is* not Samaria, as Damascus.

In this verse, the Assyrian glories in the great success that had attended his arms in his various martial

* 2 Cor. x. 13.

enterprises.—None of the cities against which he had directed his arms, had been able to resist the forces sent against them; but all of them had yielded to his victorious armies, some of which are here mentioned. Calno was a very ancient city, probably built in the days of Nimrod, the mighty hunter, near to the river Tigris, to the eastward of Babel*.' Carchemish was a town built on the Euphrates, not far from which Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt, fought with the king of Assyria, when Josiah, king of Judah, was slain in battle †. In ancient times, Hamath was a famous city, possessed by the posterity of Canaan, lying to the westward of Damascus, near the boundaries of the land of Canaan, and frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. Arpad was probably a city to the northward of Damascus: it was like Hamath, a royal city, and once belonged to Syria, whose inhabitants were confounded at the Assyrian invasion ‡, Samaria and Damascus having been already repeatedly mentioned in this prophecy, I shall not here add any thing to what I have formerly said of them. These cities the king of Assyria had conquered, and placed them nearly on a level with respect to the privileges they were allowed to enjoy, as is plainly intimated in the words before us, on which it is unnecessary to say any thing farther.

10 As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria:

11 Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?

The haughty Assyrian monarch expresses, in these verses, his proud contempt of the God of Israel, by the favour of whose providence he was exalted to the throne of Assyria.—The kingdoms of the idols, of

* See Gen. x. 10. † 2 Chron. xxxv. 20. *et seq.* ‡ Jer. xlix.
which

which he here speaks, were the nations who imagined that they were indebted to them for protection and defence, and who were devoted to their worship and service. In the style of scripture, an idol is nothing in the world, and consequently is no god. In allusion to this description of the Heathen deities, the sacred poet thus invites us to sing unto Jehovah: ‘The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens*.’ They are not what their deluded votaries suppose them to be, nor are they at all possessed of those qualities which are vainly ascribed to them by those who do them homage. Of these idolatrous nations the king of Assyria boasts, that his hand had found them. He laid hold of them as a prey to his unbounded ambition and rapacity: by his victorious arms he obtained over them complete conquest, and rendered them provinces of his extensive empire. On comparison, it appeared to him, that the graven images of these nations far excelled, in value, sculpture, and magnificence, those of Samaria and Jerusalem. You are surprised at the comparison. Indeed it is truly astonishing to hear, that, notwithstanding the many strict prohibitions which the true God delivered to his people Israel against every species of idolatry, there were among them graven images. As idolatry was forbidden the Israelites under the severest penalties, it was for most part secretly committed; and, therefore, as may naturally be supposed, their images were not so elegant and costly as were those made by the people among whom idolatry was publicly authorized and practised.

Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? The vaunting monarch here animates himself to proceed in hostile attempts against Judea, by the success that attended

* Psa. xcvi. 4, 5.

his arms when directed against other nations. The language is similar to that used by the messenger sent to Hezekiah, king of Judah, whose words are recorded, 2 Kings xix. 11, 12, 13. By speaking in this insolent manner, this proud ambitious prince vilified and blasphemed the true God, who was worshipped at Jerusalem, as the king of Judah acknowledged in his prayer, after he received the message above referred to. By this daring conduct, which he pursued in open defiance of the omnipotent Jehovah, he exposed himself to the divine vengeance, which afterward fell with a crushing weight upon his guilty head.—God, my brethren, may pass over many sins of ignorance and weakness, which men daily commit; but when they presume to profane his great name, and to insult his glorious majesty, they shall not escape his righteous judgment.

12 Wherefore it shall come to pass, *that* when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion, and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.

The prophet now foretels the certain punishment of the king of Assyria, whose enormous crimes called aloud for vengeance.—The time which infinite wisdom had fixed for abasing the pride of Assyria is marked by these words: *When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion, and on Jerusalem.* This expression, as the learned Vitringa observes, must be understood not absolutely, but with considerable restrictions; not as comprehending all the works of judgment which God was about to execute upon Zion and Jerusalem for their sins, and the great work of redemption which was there to be consummated in the last days, but the whole work of God which was immediately to precede and introduce the fall of the Assyrian empire.

This

This limited sense of the words is quite consistent with the rules necessary to be observed in the interpretation of the prophetic scriptures, in which the beginning and the completion of the work of God, which is always perfect, are indissolubly connected, and a part is often substituted to express the whole. In this manner the words of Jesus Christ may be explained, which you read, Matth. xxiv. 34. ‘ Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled ;’ where he affirms, that seeing the predictions he had delivered begun to be accomplished, was in effect beholding their full completion. Agreeable to this remark, the judgments executed by Sennacherib upon the posterity of Israel, on the one hand, may be viewed as the certain prelude of all the calamities afterward inflicted upon them by the kings of Assyria ; and, on the other, the slaughter of Sennacherib’s army may be considered as introductory to the fall and destruction of the Assyrian empire. According to this principle, the import of the words before us is shortly this : After God hath severely chastened his people with the rod of his anger, for their hypocrisy and wickedness, which was the beginning of the work of judgment, which he afterward completed by the Romans, he would then punish the intolerable pride and blasphemy of the Assyrian monarch.

I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. The stout heart here threatened is entirely different from true magnanimity or greatness of mind, arising from good principles, and accompanied with other virtues, which excites to the most laudable and renowned actions. It is an odious stubborn disposition, which acts in direct contrariety to lowliness of mind and poverty of spirit, whereby people are inclined to think modestly of their abilities and performances: it proceeds from pride, is strengthened by external grandeur and dignity, and discovered by vain self-conceit, and foolish boasting

boasting of past exertions and successes, and future intended enterprises. The fruit of the king of Assyria's stout heart, was a daring expedition against Jerusalem, undertaken in proud contempt of the true God, and accompanied with blasphemous insults, repeatedly offered to the Most High over all the earth.—The glory of his high looks significantly expresses the self-sufficiency, the vain glory, and the supercilious disdain wherewith he treated his inferiors, which were most conspicuous in the countenance and conduct of the Assyrian prince. The Lord, therefore, who hateth a proud look, declares, that he was determined to punish his arrogance; who was among the chief of the generation of those concerning whom Agur thus speaks: ‘How lofty are their eyes! and their eye-lids are lifted up*.’—The fulfilment of this prediction you may read in the thirty-seventh chapter of this prophecy, 36th and following verses.—Thus we see the proverb verified, which saith, ‘Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall †.’ Righteous vengeance belongeth unto the Lord, who never fails to punish the pride and haughtiness of men in the most proper season. After the prince of Tyrus was lifted up, God sent strangers upon him, to bring him down to the pit ‡: when the heart of Edom was become proud, the Lord threw him down ||: and when the heart of the king of Assyria had waxed stout, the Lord declared he would punish the glory of his high looks. Let us then, with Nebuchadnezzar, after his experience of this truth, and restoration to his kingdom, ‘praise, extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase §.’

13 For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom; for I am

* Prov. xxx. 13. † Prov. xvi. 18. ‡ Ezek. xxviii. 6, 7, 8.
 || Obad. 3, 4. § Dan. iv. 37.

prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man.

This and the following verse contain the illustration and proof of what hath been already said respecting the king of Assyria, of whose arrogancy and vain glory a farther description is given.—To his own strength, wisdom, and prudence, and not to God, whom he refused to acknowledge, he insolently ascribes all his great exploits, the prosperity that attended his martial enterprises, the victories of his armies, the grandeur and extent of his empire. To the strength and valour of his troops, to his political wisdom and discernment, to his discretion and prudence, he attributes the honour and glory of all the desired success that crowned his military operations, which corresponded with his highest expectations. To these causes he presumptuously assigns the following effects of power and conquest:—*I have removed the bounds of the people.* The people here intended were; I suppose, those who belonged to the Assyrian empire, and to the several neighbouring nations with whom the Assyrian monarch had successfully contended in battle. The boundaries of his own dominions he had greatly enlarged by conquest, and extended his sovereignty over great part of the earth; and thus the limits of other nations were much changed and contracted.—*And have robbed their treasures.* The treasures of the people spoken of, comprehended their liberty and property, their silver and gold, and other valuable effects, which they most esteemed, and gave up with the greatest reluctance. These treasures he vauntingly boasts that he had robbed, either by concealed fraud and secret deceit, under the pretext of acting with justice and equity, or by open force and violence, consuming, spoiling, and destroying all that lay within his reach.—*And I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant*

a valiant

a valiant man. The inhabitants of the different states which the king of Assyria had conquered, he deprived of their former importance, with the prerogatives they had enjoyed, and reduced them to an abject and despicable condition. Acting in this arbitrary manner, he vainly compares himself to a valiant man, a strong courageous person, who, according to his pleasure, disposes of those who are weak, and unable to make any effectual resistance.—From the striking instance of pride, self-conceit, and contempt of God, here recorded for our instruction, let us beware of vainly attributing our successes to our own abilities, and neglecting to acknowledge the supreme Disposer of all events, lest we dash upon that dangerous rock which proved the ruin of the Assyrian. The prophet Habakkuk speaks of those whose portion is fat, and their meat plenteous, who sacrificed to their own net, and burnt incense to their own drag. They ascribed the honour and praise of all their affluence and enjoyments to second causes, and thus put them in the place of God. Aware of the sin and folly of such conduct, ‘give unto the Lord glory and strength: give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name*.’

14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs *that are left*, have I gathered all the earth, and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.

The king of Assyria is here represented as glorying in another display of his strength and wisdom.—The metaphor employed in this description is simple and beautiful, and alludes to the well-known practice of birds, who having deposited their eggs in their nests, with the utmost attention and diligence, take care for their safety: if, through fear of being caught, they

* Psal. xvi. 7, 8.

are obliged to leave them, and quit their nests, they flee about, moving their wings, and peeping, in this manner expressing somewhat resembling grief and concern for the loss they are obliged to sustain. By this figurative language, the great success that attended the Assyrian monarch, in collecting, with the utmost avidity, the riches of the nations he had conquered, and subjected to his power, is significantly represented. The first solicitude of this avaricious tyrant would be, to find out whereof their riches and treasures consisted, and where they were laid up: having made this discovery, he possessed himself of them by fraud or extortion, by grievous impositions and exorbitant taxes, that he might employ them in gratifying his covetous desires, and vain glorious designs. These acts of injustice and rapacity reached not only to the people of some few countries which were situated in his neighbourhood, but, if we believe this vaunting prince, to all the earth, where his conquests had extended far and wide. By this insatiable covetousness and cruelty, he would no doubt oblige many of the inhabitants to desert their habitations, and flee away to other countries: whilst he counteracted the great ends of good government, instead of being a father to the people under his dominion, and acting toward them with moderation and equity, he deprived them of their liberty, estates, and possessions, and obliged them to submit to the greatest hardships. Such, however, was the power of this great prince, or rather oppressive tyrant, that none of those whom he spoiled of their wealth durst resist his power, defend themselves or their property from his encroachments, or complain of the injustice and hardships which they suffered. Sensible of their own inability to oppose force to force, and overwhelmed with the dread of still greater evils than those which they felt, they quietly, though reluctantly, submitted to that oppression which they could not avoid:—

The character of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, is here justly

justly delineated, in so far as we can judge from other concurring testimonies of scripture and ancient history, which attribute to him the pride, rapacity, and conquest whereof he now boasts.—You who are fond of amassing wealth, beware of increasing your riches by fraud, injustice, and extortion, and of adding to your own possessions by encroaching on the property of other people. To augment your enjoyments, and to gratify your avarice and vanity, at the expence of others, especially of those who dare not complain of your conduct, is not only iniquitous, but highly criminal in a peasant as well as a prince, and a practice always dangerous in the extreme.

15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake *itself* against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up *itself*, as if it were no wood.

The prophet, in this verse, shews the absurdity of the sentiments above delivered, and reprehends the pride of the Assyrian monarch by two apt similitudes, in which he again reminds him of his entire dependence upon God, and that he acted continually under his direction and control.—The haughty prince is informed, that his vain glory was no less absurd than if the axe, with which the proprietor or tradesman cuts down and squares the timber, should vauntingly boast, that it, and not the artificer by whom it was used, performed the work, for executing which it was employed as an instrument.—That his self-importance and self-conceit were as ridiculous as if the saw, used in cutting wood (supposing it endowed with the faculty of speech), should presumptuously magnify its own powers, and set at nought the workman, whose skill and ability gave it the direction and force that enabled it to perform the purposes to which it was

was applied.—That speaking and acting in the manner he had done were as inconsistent with the dependent condition of a creature, as if the rod or staff, that is no more than a bit of wood, destitute of life and activity, should be supposed to lift up itself against the person who moved it, and to resist that agency, without which it could do nothing. What instructions are these similitudes designed to inculcate? They clearly teach, that nothing can be more impious and absurd than that men, however eminent their station, and great their power, ascribe to themselves, independent of God, the direction and government of the affairs of this world. The invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are as conspicuous in the things that are done, as in the things that are made. True, indeed, God is pleased to use instruments for executing his purposes, not because he cannot, with equal ease and success, work without them; but that, by their means, he may more illustriously display his own glory, that he may employ every creature in his service, and dispose of it according to his pleasure.—They plainly inform us, that the king of Assyria entirely depended upon God in all his motions and enterprises, notwithstanding he was insensible of this dependence. All the powers he possessed, of deliberating upon public affairs, of forming plans of operation, and carrying them into execution, proceeded from God, without whom he could do nothing; and who, when he pleased, could have deprived him of his abilities. The exercise of all his faculties were so limited and circumscribed by divine providence, that he could not do more or less, or act otherwise, than to fulfil the counsel of the Most High. This doctrine is founded upon scripture, where we are taught, that the great Lord of the universe, though infinitely holy in all his operations, so presides over the actions of men, that nothing can happen contrary to his decree, and that even their criminal conduct he renders subservient

servient to the purposes whereby his own glory is manifested. Of this truth a remarkable proof is adduced by the apostle Peter, who affirms, that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, by wicked hands, was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God *. I attempt not to explain the manner of the divine operation, nor to shew the consistency of this doctrine with the perfect purity and rectitude of Jehovah, which is perhaps too profound a subject to be investigated by human understanding in its present enfeebled and corrupted state; and, therefore, this matter ought always to be treated with the greatest modesty and delicacy.—What is man, in his best estate, that he should be proud and vain glorious? Whatever prerogatives we enjoy, it becomes us often to remember, and humbly to acknowledge, that we are dust and ashes, a shadow, a vapour, a flower in the field, and altogether vanity; and that, as instruments in the hand of God, we are no more than the axe and the saw in the hand of the artificer. Deeply convinced that all the gifts and powers with which we are furnished proceed from God, let us beware of employing them as weapons of rebellion against him, and of becoming proud and vain of what we have received from him.

16 Therefore shall the Lord, the LORD of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness, and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire.

In this and the following verses, the punishment hinted at in the 12th verse is more particularly represented, which God determined to inflict upon the Assyrian monarch, on account of his pride and rapacity.—The author of the following judgments is the Lord, the Lord of hosts, who is holy in all his ways, just and true in all his works; who, by the fulfilment

* Acts ii. 23.

of this prediction, was to afford an eminent display of his majesty, omnipotence, and tender care of his people. The instruments of divine vengeance being frequently visible and felt, we are too apt to neglect to inquire into the causes from which it proceeds, to overlook the appointment of the Lord of hosts, to disquiet ourselves, and to fret against those who have been the means of our punishment; and, therefore, the scripture often leads up our thoughts to him who correcteth the nations. Let us attend to the various instructive emblems by which our prophet describes the judgments to be executed upon Assyria. The first metaphor is taken from a consumption, which wastes the flesh and fatness, and impairs the beauty and vigour of health and prosperity. By the fat ones of the king of Assyria, may be meant his numerous, well-disciplined, stout, good-looking soldiers, who were much admired by those who beheld them on account of their appearance: or by them might be intended his nobles, governors, and chief officers, with other great men who were his attendants. Among these God declares he would send leanness, which being often the effect of distress, is accompanied with great weakness, and a mean appearance. The expression may denote, that the Assyrian army was to be deprived of its best troops by a sudden mortal distemper, which was to make sad ravages among the principal officers, whilst those who remained were to look ill, pale, and lean. A prediction very similar to this was afterward delivered by the prophet Zephaniah, against the children of Moab and Ammon, who reproached the people of God, and magnified themselves against them: ‘ This shall
 ‘ they have for their pride, because they have re-
 ‘ proached and magnified themselves against the
 ‘ people of the Lord of hosts. The Lord will be
 ‘ terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods
 ‘ of the earth *.’

* Zeph. ii. 10, 11.

And under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. The metaphor here used alludes to the fire, which, in a very short time, reduces to ashes the combustible matter that lies within its reach. Fire is frequently mentioned in scripture, as the instrument which God employs in executing righteous judgment upon sinners. The Lord rained upon Sodom, and Gomorrah, brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven *. Among the wonderful plagues sent upon the Egyptians, was fire mingled with hail †. When the anger of the Lord was kindled against the Israelites, on account of their murmuring, we read, that the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them who were in the uttermost parts of the camp ‡. At the request of the prophet Elijah, fire came down from heaven, and consumed the captain, and his fifty men, that were sent to apprehend him §. In these and other instances, the fire spoken of was extraordinary and miraculous, as was that which is threatened to consume the glory of Assyria, consisting in the well-furnished powerful army of that empire, which constituted its strength and defence. Under this glory the Lord was to kindle a burning, whereby it should suddenly and irresistibly be devoured. The prophecy, when compared with the accomplishment, which you read, 2 Kings xix. 35. *et seq.* is easy to be understood, and therefore requires little illustration. By this fire, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, lost, in one night, of his vast army lying before Jerusalem, one hundred and eighty-five thousand men; after which, with the remainder, he was obliged to return to his own country, where not long after he was put to death by his sons. In this manner was the prediction before us most remarkably verified; and the event is record-

* Gen. xix. 24. † Exod. ix. 23, 24. ‡ Numb. xi. 1. *et seq.*
 § 2 Kings i. 10.

ed for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

17. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day.

The judgment threatened in the preceding verse is in these words farther described and explained.—I suppose the Son of God, the Angel of the divine presence, to whom is committed the administration of all the affairs relative to the church of God, is the Person intended by the light of Israel, and his holy One. This character justly belongs to him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all; who is the true light, prefigured by the typical lamps hung out to alleviate the darkness of the former dispensation; and who, by this designation, is distinguished from those dangerous false lights that have appeared in the world. He is the light of the world, who spake natural light into existence, who lighted up all the great luminaries of heaven, and enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world with the light of reason and understanding. This description may have a special reference to the very conspicuous part which this illustrious Person acted toward Israel, when he conducted them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, toward the promised land of rest. By a pillar of fire, he illuminated their camp, and directed their marches through the desert, during the darkness of the night; and afforded them all that typical light which they enjoyed from the institutions of the law. Especially is he the light of Israel, as he enlightens them with the knowledge of the truths and ways of God; and whilst he consumes their enemies, he purifies them from corruption to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works.—With equal propriety is the Son of God called his holy One. In his divine nature, he is glorious in holiness; in his human nature, he is holy, harmless,

harmless, and undefiled; in all his offices, operations, and instructions, he displays the most consummate righteousness, rectitude, and purity; and from him proceed all those beauties of holiness with which his people are adorned, and in which they shine forth before men, to the glory of their heavenly Father.— Concerning this glorious Person the prophet declares, that, in the destruction of Assyria,

He shall be for a fire, and for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day. Devouring fire and flame make a terrible appearance in the view of spectators. What a dreadful sight to behold a large ship of war on fire, or a great city in flames! Fire and flame not only strike the beholders with terror, but also give occasion to great pain and agony to those on whom they lay hold; and, therefore, when the judgments of God were abroad on the earth, our prophet thus describes his own condition, and that of his devout countrymen: ‘As a woman with child that draweth near the time of her delivery is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O Lord*.’ To this I add, that fire and flame destroy all that lie within their reach: hence the royal poet thus speaks of desolating judgments: ‘Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them†.’ On these and similar accounts, the light, and holy One of Israel is here foretold to be for a fire and flame. How formidable, how terrible would be his appearance at the time to which this prediction refers, when his kindled wrath was quickly to consume the glory of one of the greatest empires in the world! How acute the pain, how great the distress, which would be felt by those who were consumed by this fire and flame, and how dreadful the consumption that was to attend the accomplishment of the event

* Isaiah xxvi. 17.

† Psal. xxi. 9.

here foretold! and, therefore, with great propriety, the judgment, to be executed by the Son of God, is expressed by fire and flame, which were to devour the briers and thorns in one day. The Assyrian forces, composed of the common people of that extensive empire, are doubtless intended by the figurative description of briers and thorns. Like these kinds of bushes, they were exceeding numerous, closely interwoven and connected with one another: none could touch them, far less break through them, without being much hurt; and, like combustible stuff, they were ready to be consumed by fire and flame. So rapid was to be the progress of divine judgment, that they were to be devoured in one day, in a very short space of time, alluding probably to the sudden overthrow of Sennacherib's army in one night.

18 And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth.

The dreadful progress of the above-mentioned devouring fire and flame is here marked, and its direful effects upon Assyria are more fully delineated.—The forest of the king of Assyria, the glory of which was to be consumed, is not to be literally explained, of the royal forest that contained all sorts of game belonging to the king; but must be figuratively understood, either as denoting those large and populous cities, in which were built magnificent palaces and temples, with other public edifices, and vast numbers of houses, some of which contained the most eminent people in the empire; or rather, as signifying the principal viceroys, the richest nobles, the most powerful rulers, and valiant commanders, who were renowned for the dignity of their rank, the splendour of their condition, and their courage in the time of danger.—The glory of his fruitful field, may either denote

note the plentiful productions of the fertile lands belonging to Assyria, such as corn, wine, and oil, the delicious fruits with which their country abounded, with the prodigious quantities of cattle which attended the Assyrian prince at the time to which this prediction refers; or rather, those stout young men who had entered into the army, or in various capacities attended it, who were the beauty and glory of the fruitful country in which they were born and brought up.—*Both soul and body.* A proverbial expression, which clearly intimates the complete destruction of those who are here intended: the chief senators and counsellors, with their best officers, who were the soul whereby the nation was animated and directed; these were to fall, with the great body of the army, who were to be cut off in one night. The few who were to be exempted from the common calamity, overwhelmed with consternation and dread, should be obliged precipitantly to flee for safety.—*And they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth.* The comparison used to illustrate the timid, disorderly condition of the remains of the Assyrian army is just and beautiful. When the officer who bears the standard or ensign belonging to a regiment of soldiers faints, becomes feeble, languid, and dejected, through fear, fatigue, or the wounds he hath received, and the standard drops to the ground, or is snatched away by the enemy, the band of union is broken, confusion arises, timidity prevails, and the men make a hasty retreat. These circumstances afford a striking representation of the condition of the Assyrian army, after the threatened judgment was executed. Their hearts became feeble and faint; they were filled with dismay and perplexity, and fled with the greatest precipitation for safety, like a man when his house is in imminent danger of being consumed by fire.

19 And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them.

So

So very great was to be the predicted slaughter among the Assyrian troops, which, prior to this event, were exceeding numerous, that few persons of rank and eminence were to remain: their number should be so very small, that a child, who hath made very little progress in arithmetic, was to be able to reckon and write them.—The event exactly corresponded with this prophecy. The Lord of hosts, as here foretold, kindled a fire under the glory of the king of Assyria, which devoured the greatest part of his army, and struck with a panic the few that were left, as you read in the history of this overthrow, recorded 2 Kings xix. 35. and following verses.—From this prediction, compared with its accomplishment, we learn this important lesson, That when princes become proud and haughty, however flourishing their condition, however powerful their armies, however extensive their dominions, and successful their enterprises, the most high God will certainly abase and punish them. We know the Lord is greater than all gods; for in the thing wherein they deal proudly, he is above them. Pharaoh king of Egypt boasted, that he would pursue and overtake, divide the spoil of Israel, and that his hand should destroy them. What followed this vaunting declaration? God did blow with his wind, the sea covered them, and he and his host sunk like lead in the mighty waters. Zedekiah king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and Sennacherib king of Assyria, with many others who walked in pride, have all been humbled and laid low, by him who resisteth the proud. ‘Be wise now
 ‘ therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of
 ‘ the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice
 ‘ with trembling*.’ And ye, my brethren, ‘talk
 ‘ no more so exceeding proudly, let not arrogancy
 ‘ come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of
 knowledge, and by him actions are weighed †.’

* Psal. ii. 10. 11.

† 1 Sam. ii. 3.

20 ¶ And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them: but shall stay upon the LORD, the holy One of Israel, in truth.

In this and the following verse, are described the happy consequences of the awful judgment above foretold, respecting the state of the church of God.— After this memorable deliverance wrought for the people of God, they should withdraw their dependence from human aid, and place unsuspecting confidence upon his grace, power, and faithfulness, who had miraculously saved them from impending destruction. The season marked out for this event is thus expressed: *And it shall come to pass in that day*, or in those days, or after that day, in which the foregoing prediction should be fulfilled. Whether we consider the period of time here intended, as very near to, or more remote from the calamity it was to succeed, the words must be understood in one or other of the above senses. Immediately after the destruction of the Assyrian army, the prediction before us was partially fulfilled in the reign of Hezekiah, when the remnant of Israel, contemplating the wonderful interposition of Jehovah in their favour, would no more trust in Assyria for assistance, but stayed upon God alone, who saved them when they were in the most perilous circumstances. It received a more full completion long afterward, when the New Testament dispensation commenced, at the period to which the apostle Paul expressly applies this passage, in the ninth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, ver. 27, 28. To both these periods, though very distant from each other, this prophecy doubtless refers. The former, which was at no great distance from the time in which it was delivered, might chiefly engross the prophet's attention; and the literal accomplishment which it
then

then received, served as a specimen and proof of its progressive and more perfect completion, chiefly and ultimately intended by its divine Author.—May this prophecy be fulfilled this day, not only in your ears, but in your hearts and lives, by your renouncing all confidence in an arm of flesh, which exposes to the curse of God, and trusting with all your heart on the Lord; then shall you never be disappointed of your hope, nor ashamed of your expectation of mercy, of seasonable deliverance, and eternal salvation.—The subjects of this prophecy are thus described :

The remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob. After God hath punished, in perfect righteousness, the enemies of his glory and the felicity of his people, he always reserves to himself a remnant, who, having escaped abounding iniquity and desolating judgments, place their trust in him, and return unto him. In that day, at the time his justice punished the Egyptians, his mercy was extended unto Israel. When the idolatrous worship of Baal prevailed through the land of Israel, God was pleased to reserve to himself a remnant of seven thousand, who bowed not the knee to that idol. After the Assyrians were overthrown, the house of Jacob escaped. After the Medes and Persians laid Babylon and her land desolate, ‘ In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, and seek the Lord their God : they shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward*.’ After the commencement of the New Testament dispensation, and the enemies of the Son of God were overwhelmed by desolating calamities, a remnant, a few remaining of a great number, were saved, as the apostle Paul declares, in the passage above mentioned : ‘ Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved †.’ In the execution of

* Jer. l. 4.

† Rom. ix, 27.

the most terrible judgments, God always remembers mercy. Amidst the destruction of the old world, Noah and his family were saved: amidst the overthrow of Sodom, Lot and his family were delivered: amidst the unbelieving, impenitent Israelites, a remnant was to stay upon God. The apostle of the Gentiles, speaking of this subject, affirms, That this residue, which God reserves, proceeds from the election of grace, the sovereign good pleasure of God; and if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace.—The persons spoken of in this verse, are likewise described as the escaped of the house of Jacob, who happily avoiding the prevailing corruptions of the times, and the desolating judgments whereby their enemies were destroyed, should be considered as a firebrand plucked out of the fire*. Aware of the imminent danger to which they were exposed, through abounding infidelity and wickedness, they cautiously shunned the general contagion, and were safely preserved from desolating calamities.—Concerning such it is foretold,

They shall no more again stay upon him that smote them: but shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. Being convinced of the extreme folly of leaning upon a stay which, instead of supporting, had smitten them, they were to trust no more to the power of Assyria for assistance and defence. In this condition, they should adopt the language recorded Hosea xiv. 3. ‘Asshur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.’ Heartily renouncing all vain superstitious confidences, and all dependence on confederacy with the enemies of God, for which Ahaz and his people were distressed, all their hopes of deliverance and safety should be founded upon God. ‘Truly in vain is salvation hoped

* AMOS iv. 11.

‘ for from the hills, and the multitude of mountains :
‘ truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of
‘ Israel *.’ This remnant was no longer to depend upon foreign connections, national riches, or superstitious devotions, for public or private safety ; but to trust in the Lord, that he might remove the evils they felt or feared, and seasonably to confer upon them all the blessings suited to their circumstances, firmly persuaded of his intimate acquaintance with their necessities, of his faithfulness in performing his promises, of his tender compassion and infinite ability to assist and deliver. In this manner should the remnant of Israel stay upon their holy One, in truth and sincerity, without dissimulation ; not merely in pretence or profession, but in reality. The expression denotes uprightness and integrity, in opposition to all guile and hypocrisy, either in principle or design, and this sincerity verified by a corresponding conversation and conduct.—Permit me to recommend to you, my friends, this humble dependence upon God, which is at once your indispensable duty and real felicity. Trust in him at all times, ye people. Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord. Though you may not possess the accomplishments, and enjoy the advantages of some others of your brethren, yet, by staying upon God, you shall have inward peace and comfort ; and, in every condition, he will be your support, who will never fail you. If your burdens are heavy, you are required to cast them upon the Lord, who will sustain them. In the greatest dangers, you may make a safe retreat ; when you hear evil tidings, you shall not be afraid ; and when others are ashamed of their confidence, you shall never be confounded. Stay then upon the holy One of Israel, in truth and sincerity.

21 The remnant shall return, *even* the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

* Jer. iii. 23.

The persons primarily intended in this prediction, were the remnant which God reserved to himself from among the natural posterity of Jacob, who was surnamed Israel, typical of all those who formed the remnant according to the election of grace, and constitute the spiritual posterity of that great patriarch.—The expression may comprehend all the chosen of God, in every age, and of every nation, even all Israel who shall be saved; who, renouncing confidence in human aid, depend upon the kind providence and faithful promises of their holy One, for protection and deliverance from all evil.—All these shall return unto the mighty God. Man, in his primitive state, was admitted into the divine presence, and enjoyed intimate communion with God: his image was his glory, his favour was his life, his will was his rule, his glory was his aim, and his approbation the joy of his heart. Being in honour, however, man continued not long in this happy state; but, forsaking the fountain of living water, he hewed out to himself broken cisterns that could hold no water. He departed from God, and turned aside to go after lying vanities. Notwithstanding their ingratitude, sin, and folly, such are the tender mercies of God, that, having opened a new and living way of access into his presence, he graciously invites men to return to him from whom they deeply revolted, that iniquity may not prove their ruin; he directs in what manner this exercise ought to be performed; and animates to this necessary duty, by the most reviving prospects, and gracious assurances. And that no encouragement may be wanting, he declares, in the words before us, that a remnant shall return to the mighty God, who can easily remove every obstacle that lies in the way; who can subdue all our iniquities, vanquish our spiritual enemies, strengthen with all might in the inner man for his service, and do exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think.—You must acknowledge, that, with
others,

others, you have gone far from God, that your minds have been alienated from him, that you have not sought his favour, that you have not kept his commands, that you have not gratefully acknowledged his mercies, nor properly esteemed his salvation. What iniquity have you found in God that you have gone thus far from him*? Is not he infinitely amiable, and perfectly good? Did he ever falsify to you any of his promises? did he ever delude you with vain hopes? did he ever treat you with severity and rigour? did he ever enjoin you any unjust commands? did he ever fail to be the source of permanent satisfaction and joy? and hath not all his dispensations been marked with consummate goodness and benignity? Could you ever discover any blemish or deficiency in the Most High, any thing that could in reason justify you in forsaking him? If you cannot plead sufficient grounds why you have departed from the Almighty, permit me, though I should deviate a little from the plan of these Lectures, to request you to return to the Lord. If you cannot excuse your sin and folly in departing from him, surely you cannot have any good reason for refusing to return to him, who thus addresseth you: ‘ Yet return again unto me, saith the Lord †.’ Abandon your transgressions, which, if persisted in, will certainly prove your ruin: renounce those other lords who have had dominion over you, and forsake those refuges of lies in which you have taken shelter. Convinced of your sin and guilt, humbly and penitently acknowledge your horrid ingratitude and extreme folly, the disgrace and ruin to which you stand exposed. With the ardour of divine affection, return to him who is infinitely worthy of your highest love and confidence, those hearts which you have sacrilegiously alienated from him: consecrate to him those lives which have been unjustly estranged from his service by wicked works, that henceforth they may

* Jer. ii. 5.

† Jer. iii. 1.

employed to his honour. In this manner return to the mighty God, from whom you have departed; and I am verily persuaded, that you will not think me culpable for seizing this precious moment to press upon you this reasonable service, to which I pray you may be directed and assisted by him who worketh all in all. This prediction, which was in part fulfilled in the days of Hezekiah, and afterward when the posterity of Israel returned from captivity at Babylon, will then receive a more full accomplishment.

22 For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness.

In this verse, assurance is given, that, as immense numbers of the posterity of Israel would not return to the Lord, the determined desolation should certainly take an equitable course, and be exactly proportioned by him who is righteous in all his ways.—The people of Israel are compared to the sand of the sea, on the following accounts, which fully justifies the resemblance here stated. Like the sand of the sea, they were barren and unprofitable: they did not yield fruit unto God corresponding to the many important advantages which, through the mercy of the Almighty, they enjoyed. Like the same sand, which, though composed of innumerable small particles, yet, by reason of the moisture derived from the sea, are so closely united as to form one compact body, the posterity of Israel were intimately united together by one common faith and law, by means of which the whole nation formed one great compact society. Especially were they like the sand of the sea for multitude, which it is impossible either to measure or number. This last, I suppose, is the resemblance which is chiefly intended in the expression before us, and in some other passages of scripture,

ture, where, on this very account, the comparison is instituted and repeated. The promise which God gave to Abraham, that he would greatly multiply his posterity, was expressed in these words: ‘ In blessing
 ‘ I will bless thee, and multiply thy seed as the stars,
 ‘ and as the sand which is on the sea-shore*.’ This was the promise which Jacob pleaded with God, when afraid of the approach of his brother Esau, lest he would smite the mother with the children: ‘ Thou
 ‘ saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy
 ‘ seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be num-
 ‘ bered for multitude †.’ By the renewal of this promise, God was pleased to administer comfort to his people in after-times, by the prophet Hosea ‡.’ And Isaiah here declares, that though the assurance given to the father of the faithful, respecting the innumerable multitude of his posterity, should be fully accomplished, and though only a remnant of them would stay upon God, yet none of these circumstances should interfere with the fulfilment of the predicted calamities whereby they were to be severely punished.

The consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. The consumption of which our prophet here speaks, is that extensive desolation whereby great numbers of the ungodly and wicked, who would not return to the Lord, were to be overwhelmed. Their destruction was decreed and irreversibly determined by the Lord, whose counsel shall stand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart unto all generations; who doth whatever pleaseth him in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. This decreed consumption shall overflow. The expression is metaphorical; and bears an obvious allusion to a plentiful stream, which, being greatly increased by a heavy shower, extends beyond its ordinary channel, and overspreads the neighbouring grounds, which soon become covered with wa-

* Gen. xxii. 17. † Gen. xxxii. 12. ‡ Hosea i. 10.

ters. In like manner, the threatened consumption of Israel, which should take its rise from the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, was to spread very extensively among that people, so that great part of the Jewish nation was thereby to be swept away. This overthrow should be with righteousness, according to the rules of perfect equity and consummate rectitude. Whatever God hath decreed, whatever he hath declared, and whatever he hath done, is with infinite righteousness. The Lord is upright, and in him, and his dispensations, there is no unrighteousness. He is holy in all his works, true and righteous in all his ways and judgments. The Israelites by their multiplied enormous transgressions, had contemned the providence of God, corrupted his worship, violated his covenant, and trampled upon his authority: and, therefore, it was highly righteous that God should vindicate his injured honour, his neglected providence, his profaned worship and covenant; and shew to his people, and the world, that transgressors, however great may be their numbers, shall certainly be punished with the most impartial equity. The consumptions that God hath decreed often appear to men to be a great depth, which we can neither sound nor measure: we are sometimes puzzled to account for their frequency, severity, and continuance, and difficulted to discover the causes from which they proceed. Of this comfortable truth, however, we have joyful assurance, ‘That justice and judgment are the habitation of God’s throne: that mercy and truth shall go before his face*.’ When, therefore, we either see or hear of determined consumptions overflowing kingdoms, cities, or individuals, let us remember, that they are all appointed with the most perfect righteousness and equity; and that at all times we may take up the song of Moses and the Lamb,

* Psal. lxxxix. 14.

faying, ‘ Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord
 ‘ God Almighty ; juſt and true are thy ways, thou
 ‘ King of ſaints *.’

23 For the Lord GOD of hoſts ſhall make a
 conſumption, even determined in the miſt of
 all the land.

Theſe words are ſubjoined to the preceding de-
 claration, in order to confirm the awful truth which
 it contains.—The author of the predicted deſola-
 tion was the Lord God of hoſts. The Lord,
 who is ſelf-exiſtent, all-ſufficient, eternal, and un-
 changeable—God of hoſts, who is poſſeſſed of irre-
 fiſtible power to accompliſh all his purpoſes and de-
 ſigns of mercy and judgment ; who hath all the
 armies of heaven and earth at his diſpoſal, and em-
 ploys them them as ſeemeth good in his fight. The
 calamity which he threatened to inflict, was a con-
 ſumption, which ſhould make terrible deſtroyation
 among the ſinful devoted people, who were thereby
 to be greatly waſted. This deſolating judgment was
 to extend not merely to the borders, but to reach
 even to the miſt of the land. Again, it is affirmed,
 to have been determined : the time, the perſons, the
 places, the circumſtances, were all fixed in the coun-
 ſels of the Moſt High ; and, therefore, whatever
 hurry and confuſion might attend the execution, all
 was ordered and adjusted in the divine purpoſe.
 Whatſoever inſtruments God is pleaſed to employ in
 executing his deſigns, the work proceeds from him
 who is wonderful in counſel, and makes the deter-
 mined conſumption. There is a remarkable ſimila-
 rity between this prediction, and that which is re-
 corded in Chap. xxviii. at the 22d verſe, which is intro-
 duced with this ſalutary advice, attention to which
 ſeems to be particularly requiſite when conſidering this

* Rev. xv. 3.

subject: ‘ Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your hands be made strong.’ Though we may not perceive the equity and wisdom with which determined consumptions are made, yet, in the contemplation of such astonishing events, we may justly exclaim, ‘ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out *!’—The prophecy we have now considered, received a partial fulfilment in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and afterward about the time of the Babylonish captivity. It was more fully accomplished after the Son of God was manifested in the flesh as the Saviour of the world, according to the promises made to the fathers, when some of the people of Israel having returned to the Lord, the rest were rejected; and, on account of their wicked contempt of the great Messiah, his Spirit, and gospel, they were miserably consumed and destroyed by the Romans.

24 ¶ Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt.

The prophet, having a little digressed from his subject, now returns to prosecute the proper design of his discourse, which was to comfort the hearts of the godly, in the prospect of the impending evils that threatened the destruction of the Jewish nation.—On this benevolent work he again enters, directing them, in the sacred name, and by the supreme authority of the same glorious and mighty Lord, who would make the determined consumption above mentioned, to lay aside their disquieting and desponding fears. With what earnestness and affection doth the Most High address them—*O my people*. The following friendly

* Rom. xi. 33.

advice is directed to those whom the Lord had made his willing people in a day of his power, by reconciling and sanctifying them to himself, that they might serve him in holiness and righteousness all their days, and worship him in the ordinances of his appointment: it is given to those whom he had avouched to be a holy people unto himself, whom he had distinguished from others by the most signal favours, and purified to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works.—They are farther described, from the place of their residence, *That dwellest in Zion.* Zion, you know, was the mountain upon which was built the temple of the Lord, highly celebrated for its unrivalled magnificence, its beautiful ornaments, and rich furniture; and, above all, for the symbols of the divine presence and glory with which it was honoured. Upon the sides of this mountain stood the city Jerusalem, the metropolis of the kingdom of Judah. Those whom our prophet at this time primarily addressed, were the devout people, fearing the Lord, who resided in Jerusalem and Zion. As for the other cities and towns of Judea, they were probably occupied by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, or subject to his authority, as he plainly affirms by the ambassador whom he sent to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The persons who are here ultimately intended, are those who reside in Zion, the church of the living God, the ground of truth; who are Israelites indeed, the holy seed, the upright among men, the spiritual circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, have no confidence in the flesh, and rejoice in Christ Jesus. To such thus saith the Lord God of hosts,

Be not afraid of the Assyrian. Few directions are more frequently repeated in scripture, or more warmly inculcated upon the people of God, than the one now before us, *Be not afraid.* Even good men, when in perilous circumstances, are apt to become timid and fearful. About this time the proud king of Assyria, flushed with his former victories, advanced with

with all his glory toward Jerufalem, invested that city, and threatened to spread defolation through all the land of Judah; and, to human appearance, he had the probable prospect of fuccess. Notwithstanding the approach of this formidable enemy, those who feared the Lord were called upon not to be afraid, not to faint in their minds or be dismayed, not to sink into despondency, but to exercise fortitude and courage, with firm confidence in the Lord their God. Dismaying fears would only have increased their anxieties and dangers: they would have embarrassed and distressed their minds, enfeebled and disabled them from action, deprived them of comfort, and multiplied their sorrows. Therefore did the wisdom of God dissuade them from being afraid of the Assyrian, their most formidable enemy, of whom they doubtless imagined that they had great reason to be afraid.—Surely then the people of God, who reside within the pale of his church, ought not to fear their most powerful enemies, however hostile and terrible their appearance. Were you exposed to their rage and fury, they might spoil your fields, plunder your houses, divest you of your reputation, banish you from the society of your friends, and, doing their utmost, they might kill your bodies. Fear them not: they cannot deprive you of your most sublime pleasures; they cannot rob you of the true riches; they cannot bereave you of your highest glory, your present most valuable enjoyments, and future prospects.

He shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. These words plainly intimate, that the people of God shall not be exempted from necessary deserved correction. The expression evidently refers to the servile condition in which the children of Israel were detained in the land of Egypt, where they were grievously oppressed, and treated with the utmost severity, by their cruel tyrannical masters. Moses, who was perfectly acquainted with their condition, thus describeth their state of servitude:

servitude: ‘The Egyptians made their lives bitter with
 ‘ hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all
 ‘ manner of service in the field: all their service where-
 ‘ in they made them serve, was with rigour*.’ They
 set over the Israelites task-masters, to afflict them with
 their burdens. Again, we read, that ‘the officers of
 ‘ the children of Israel, which Pharaoh’s task-masters
 ‘ had set over them, were beaten, when their daily
 ‘ tasks were not fulfilled; so that they saw they were
 ‘ in an evil case †.’ After this manner were the po-
 sterity of Jacob to be rigorously treated by the Assy-
 rians as slaves; who are often, alas! severely and in-
 humanly beaten with a rod, and against whom the
 staff is lifted up, sometimes to strike, and at other
 times to terrify. The meaning of the prediction
 seems to be shortly this: The people of Judah were to
 be subjected to the tyrannical power of Assyria, and
 reduced to a state of servitude, wherein they should
 be obliged to sustain similar hardships with their fa-
 thers during their bondage in Egypt. The event
 exactly corresponded with this prediction. The Assy-
 rians having grievously afflicted the Jewish nation, as
 a rigorous master beats his poor slave, they lifted up
 the staff, threatening them with more severe punish-
 ment by Rab-shakeh, who outrageously insulted the in-
 habitants of Jerusalem.—Though you read in scrip-
 ture of bondmen and bondwomen, and of people re-
 duced to a state of slavery, I hope there are none of
 you, my friends, who from thence conclude, that the
 word of God gives the least sanction to tyranny,
 cruelty, and oppression. No, no: so far from giving
 countenance to any such cruel practice, that Jehovah
 himself appeared on earth for the very purpose of de-
 livering the Israelites from the tyranny and oppression
 of the Egyptians. On that memorable occasion, the
 Lord thus spake unto Moses: ‘I have surely seen the
 ‘ affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have

* Exod. i. 14.

† Exod. v. 14.

‘ heard their cry, by reason of their task-masters :
 ‘ for I know their sorrows. And I am come down
 ‘ to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians *.’
 And afterward, when Jehovah acted as the Legislator
 of Israel, he published, among others, the following
 statute : ‘ If a man smite his servant with a rod, and
 ‘ he die under his hand, he shall be surely punish-
 ‘ ed.—And if a man smite the eye of his servant,
 ‘ and if he smite out his tooth, he shall let him go
 ‘ free †.’ Indeed there is not one sin more frequently
 prohibited in the sacred writings than cruelty and op-
 pression, and perhaps there is not one crime that is
 more severely punished in the course of divine provi-
 dence. The golden rule, by which Christians are re-
 quired to regulate their conduct, expressly forbids
 every species of barbarity and ill usage : ‘ Whatsoever
 ‘ you would that men should do to you, do ye even
 ‘ so to them †.’ In few words, the tender compassions
 of God, the precepts of Jesus Christ, and the sacred
 rights of humanity, unite in reprobating that system
 of cruelty, tyranny, and injustice, which slavery tends,
 through the corruption of men, to establish. As
 imitators of God, in the relation of his dear children,
 you ought to entertain a just abhorrence of this ini-
 quitous commerce ; which, I hope, legislators will soon
 be wise enough to abolish.

25 For yet a very little while, and the indig-
 nation shall cease, and mine anger in their de-
 struction.

The short continuance of the above-mentioned ca-
 lamity is here foretold.—The time to which the
 indignation should be limited, is expressed by a very
 little while. Those periods which appear long to
 human view, are often represented in scripture as
 of very short duration, of which many instances

* Exod. iii. 7, 8. † Exod. xxi. 20, 26, 27. ‡ Matth. vii. 12.

occur in the Prophecies. I shall refer you to one as a specimen. ‘Behold (saith the Lord, by the prophet Malachi), I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple*.’ This prediction relates to the coming of Jesus Christ, who was to be preceded by his forerunner, John the Baptist; and though they were not to appear for four hundred years after the prophecy was delivered, they are nevertheless said to come suddenly. The church is invited to celebrate the praises of Jehovah in the most animating manner: ‘Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.’ Why? ‘For his anger endureth but for a moment †.’ Whilst the people of God have reason to mourn, for having provoked his displeasure; they have much cause to sing, because his anger endureth only for a very small space of time, compared with the joys they have in prospect. This manner of speaking is perfectly suitable to the majesty and eternity of that God with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. In the verse we are now illustrating, the time which intervened between the delivery and the accomplishment of this prophecy, is said to be a very little while, though it might be about thirty years, if we suppose that the prediction was published near the beginning of Ahaz’s reign, and fulfilled about the fourteenth year of Hezekiah. At the expiration of this comparatively short period, the indignation of God against his people should cease.—God was displeased not only with Assyria, but with Jerusalem: his wrath kindled against the former, was to terminate in their destruction; his anger against the latter, not being accompanied so much with the desire of taking vengeance, as of reclaiming them from their evil ways, would be pacified, when that purpose was in some

* Mal. iii. 1.

† Psal. xxx. 4.

measure accomplished.—From all which we learn this comfortable truth, That the displeasure of God shall not long continue against his people; that he punishes them less than their sins deserve, and with the judgments he inflicts always intermixes much mercy.

26 And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him, according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and *as* his rod *was* upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt.

Our prophet now foretels the judgment whereby the Lord of hosts was about to destroy the power of Assyria, which is illustrated by two similitudes; in one of which it is compared to the overthrow of the Midianites at the rock of Oreb; and in the other, to that of the Egyptians at the Red sea.—The Assyrians having beaten the Jewish nation with a rod and staff, God therefore declares, that he would sharply and severely punish them with a scourge, and oblige them to desist from the rash and foolish enterprize they had formed. The scourge intended in this prediction, was not made of small cords plaited with bits of wire, like those used by cruel vindictive people, when, without mercy, they whip their poor fellow-creatures, who cannot and dare not resist them. The scourge denotes the sword, pestilence, or other deadly weapon or disease, wherewith the angel of the Lord smote the great multitude of the Assyrian army, which were slain by him in one night. The instrument employed for this purpose was very properly called a scourge, on account of the acute pain with which it was accompanied, the ignominy and contempt to which the Assyrians were thereby exposed.—This divine judgment is compared to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb, of which you read in the seventh chapter of Judges. To this memorable overthrow of the inveterate enemies of Israel the prophet

phet referred at the fourth verse of the ninth chapter; here he alludes to the same great event. The destruction of the Assyrians, like the slaughter of the Midianites, should be very sudden, unexpected, and extensive, reaching not only to the common soldiers, but to the chief officers and greatest commanders. And as at the rock of Oreb one of the princes of Midian was slain, after Israel had obtained a complete victory, so, after the Assyrian army were defeated, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed in the temple of his god Nifroch. The event foretold is also compared to the overthrow of the Egyptians at the Red sea, the history of which is recorded in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Exodus, where we read, that the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Stretch out thine
 ‘hand over the sea, that the waters may come again
 ‘upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon
 ‘their horsemen.’ At this time the rod, called the rod of God, was no doubt in his hand, which he lifted up, and stretched out over the sea, that its waters might return upon the enemies of Israel, and overwhelm them in the devouring deep. To this most remarkable destruction of the Egyptians there is an obvious allusion; and between this rout, and the one here predicted, there should be a striking resemblance. In each of these instances, the divine interposition, in favour of the posterity of Abraham, was truly conspicuous. Both of them were accomplished not by human strength and valour, but by the omnipotent arm of Jehovah. In both, the enemies of Israel were entirely and suddenly routed; and, by their destruction, the Israelites were delivered from bondage and affliction, that they might praise and serve their almighty Deliverer. In these and other respects, there was an intimate resemblance between the slaughter of Midian, the overthrow of the Egyptians, and the scourge which God stirred up for Assyria.—Mark attentively, I beseech you, the instructive similitude which you may observe

observe between the early and the latter interpositions of divine providence in behalf of his people, and against their enemies. The histories of the Old Testament, written for our admonition, furnish abundant matter for this agreeable employment. There you may see many similar hostile designs, formed against the people of God, frustrated and punished by similar divine judgments, to the unspeakable joy of those who trusted in the Lord. Acquaintance with this subject may be highly useful, through the divine blessing, to animate your hope and confidence in God, who is unchangeable.

27 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.

The happy deliverance, consequent upon the destruction of the Assyrian power, is here foretold.— At the time in which God would execute the threatened vengeance upon Sennacherib, the Jewish nation was to be emancipated from under the grievous burden of heavy tribute which that prince exacted from them, prior to his laying siege to Jerusalem. The oppressive yoke of servitude, to which the people of Judah were subjected by the Assyrian, was likewise to be removed, and they were to be restored to the enjoyment of liberty and tranquillity. I apprehend, however, that the prediction must not be confined to this event, in which it received a literal accomplishment; but that it hath a farther respect to another and more glorious deliverance, in which it receives a more full completion. While the civil affairs of the Jewish people furnished the occasions of these prophecies, the divine wisdom, that inspired the prophet, so contrived that their spiritual concerns should also be expressed. Though the general theme of this discourse was the

temporal deliverance of the Jewish nation from the oppressive power of Assyria, the secret design of the Inspirer was to predict the spiritual salvation of the subjects of the Messiah from the service of sin and Satan, and restoration to the glorious liberty of the sons of God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ. In this view, the burden to be removed from off the shoulder, contained the intolerable weight of sin, and its guilt, which grievously oppresses the mind, and renders men weary and heavy laden. And the yoke to be taken off the neck (a figurative expression, denoting servitude or slavery), may signify the spiritual thralldom, and ignominious bondage, in which transgressors are detained by the prince of this world. From both of these, according to this prediction, those are happily delivered, ‘ who are Jews inwardly, ‘ in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is ‘ not of men, but of God *.—The destruction of this yoke is foretold to take place,

Because of the anointing. Persons from among the people of Israel, who were set apart to the important offices of prophet, priest, or king, were anointed with oil. Aaron and his sons were consecrated in this manner, to minister unto the Lord in the priests office †. Elisha, the son of Shaphat, was anointed likewise, by the express commandment of the Lord, to be prophet in the room of Elijah ‡. David and Solomon were also anointed with oil before they ascended the throne of Israel: and this rite having been performed in obedience to the divine authority, those who received this unction were called the Lord’s anointed. To this anointing the temporal deliverance of the Jewish state, from the oppression of Assyria, is here attributed; and to this, in fact, it was owing, as the history informs us. What were the means whereby the burden and yoke of Sennacherib were broken and removed from the Jews? This wonderful deliver-

* Rom. ii. 29. † Exod. xxviii. 41. ‡ 1 Kings xix. 16.

ance was not wrought by sword or bow, by horses and chariots. Military strength and prowess could not claim any share in the victory, which is ascribed to the prayers and intercessions of Hezekiah king of Judah, and of Isaiah the son of Amoz, who were no doubt joined by some of the priests of the Lord, that, like them, were also anointed with the Holy Spirit. 'For this cause (it is written, 2 Chron. xxxii. 20.) 'Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, prayed 'and cried to heaven.' The success with which their prayers were attended is related in the following verse: 'And the Lord sent an angel who cut off all 'the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria: so he returned with shame of face to his own land. And 'when he was come into the house of his god, they 'that came forth of his own bowels, slew him there 'with the sword.'—The external anointing with oil, whereby these eminent servants of the Lord were consecrated to the sacred offices in which they were invested, is well known to have been typical of the internal unction by the Holy Spirit, wherewith the Lord God anointed the Messiah to be the Prophet, Priest, and King of his church. The oil used for the purpose of anointing, under the Old Testament, afforded an instructive emblem of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, wherewith Jesus Christ was anointed without measure. It served, in some measure, to prepare those upon whom it was poured for performing the duties of their office with activity and alacrity, and was doubtless intended to represent their being furnished with the gifts and qualifications requisite for adorning their new station. Oil being of a strengthening, softening, and healing nature, and useful for preserving some substances from corruption, was therefore often applied, in eastern countries, to those who were wounded or diseased, and to those who were in a feeble condition. Oil, when mixed with aromatics, as was the oil wherewith the high-priest

priest of old was anointed, yielded a most fragrant smell, and served to exhilarate the spirits, and excite the most agreeable sensations. On these and other accounts, it was employed as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who is called the oil of gladness, wherewith our blessed Saviour was anointed, and furnished with every qualification necessary for the faithful performance of the duties belonging to the offices he sustains, all of which he executes in the most grateful and acceptable manner. Because of this anointing, which reaches the most distant members of his body the church, flowing down to the skirts of his garments, all the enemies of the people of God shall be broken and destroyed; whilst they shall be advanced to the enjoyment of liberty and felicity, having their infirmities helped, their errors corrected, and their hearts comforted, by the great Messiah, the anointed of the Lord, to whom God always hath a special respect in all the manifold salvations he works for his church. For his sake the burden and the yoke are removed.— Let us contemplate all the divine interpositions made in our behalf, as conferred upon us on his account. And as we have the honour of being called by his worthy name, let us be solicitous to participate of that blessed Spirit, wherewith he was anointed without measure, that, being consecrated to the service of the living God, and endowed with every amiable gift and grace, we may shine forth in the beauties of holiness, and prove blessings to the nation and the several societies with which we are connected.

28 He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron: at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages.

The prophet proceeds particularly to describe the Assyrian expedition against Judea, with its consequences.—He begins this part of his subject by accurately delineating the progress of Sennacherib, with

with his army, in their march toward Jerusalem, the route by which he advanced, and the several stations that he occupied; all which, under the direction of the Spirit of prophecy, he marks with equal exactness as if he had been writing the history of past events. The first station here assigned to the Assyrian prince in the land of Judea, after he passed the river Jordan, is Aiath. This was probably the city Ai, celebrated in the history of the conquests of Israel, under the command of Joshua, the servant of the Lord: the appendage *ath* might have been added to its name in later times, after it was rebuilt, having been totally destroyed when the children of Israel conquered Canaan. Then it was burnt, and made a heap, and a desolation. This city was built upon a hill, or rising ground, in the extremity of the land of Benjamin, toward the north, and situated to the eastward of Bethel.—Migron was the place where the Assyrian took his next station. This name is not mentioned in any other passage of scripture, excepting in 1 Samuel xiv. 2.; from which it appears to have been situated in the uttermost part of Gibeah, a famous city, in the north of the possession of Benjamin, to the southward of which stood the city of Jerusalem.—*At Michmash he hath laid up his carriages.* This place is mentioned in 1 Sam. xiv. 5. and seems to have lain not far from Migron, in the vicinity of mount Bethel*. Michmash was probably fortified very strongly by nature. Here was a narrow passage, with a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side; the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The one fronted toward the north, over against Michmash; and the other toward the south, opposite to Gibeah. At this place the proud monarch of Assyria laid up his carriages, with his heavy baggage, finding it would be exceedingly tedious and difficult

* See 1 Sam. xiii. 2.

to get them conveyed through this narrow passage; and judging, from the riches of the country through which he marched, and the timidity of its inhabitants, who made no resistance, that he would not have farther need of them.

29 They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid, Gibeah of Saul is fled.

Having laid up his carriages, Sennacherib, and his great army, went over the passage now mentioned, and took their fourth station at Geba, where they easily made good their quarters.—This was one of the cities, with her suburbs, which were given by Joshua, and the heads of the fathers of the children of Israel, to the priests, the posterity of Aaron; and is remarkable for having been one of those places in which the Philistines had a garrison in the days of king Saul. From the course taken by the Assyrian army, it seems to have lain between Michmash and Ramah—which signifies *elevated* or *sublime*; so that this city probably had its name from its high and conspicuous situation. It likewise belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, and was situated not far from Bethel, being memorable on account of its having been the residence of Samuel the prophet, and the place where long afterward ‘ a voice ‘ was heard, lamentation and weeping, and great ‘ mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and ‘ would not be comforted, because they are not *.’ The inhabitants of this city were terrified at the approach of the Assyrian army, and filled with consternation at the dreadful consequences that might attend their march toward the capital.—Gibeah had the name of Saul often conjoined with it, because it was the place where king Saul often resided †. A terrible scene of wickedness was once acted here, and

* Matth. ii. 18.

† 1 Sam. x. 26.

followed with tragical effects. After relating which, the inspired writer of the book of Judges makes this remark: ‘ There was no such deed done nor
 ‘ seen, from the day that the children of Israel came
 ‘ up out of the land of Egypt, unto this day: con-
 ‘ sider of it, take advice, and speak your minds*.’
 The people who dwelt here, leaving their habitations, fled to other places, where they hoped to enjoy greater tranquillity and safety.

30 Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim:
 cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth.

This and the two following verses describe the march of Sennacherib’s army, approaching Jerusalem to invest it, and the terror and confusion spreading and increasing through the several places as he advanced.—The name of Gallim is found only here, and in 1 Sam. xxv. 44. from whence we derive no assistance in ascertaining its situation, and other circumstances. It is obvious, from the connection in which it is here mentioned, that it lay in the neighbourhood of Ramah and Gibeah, in the tract of country between Gibeah and Jerusalem. The daughter, or the inhabitants of Gallim, are called upon by our prophet, to lift up their voice, that they might deplore and lament the danger of their condition, in being exposed to the merciless rage and cruelty of a powerful victorious army.—*Cause it to be heard unto Laish.* In the 18th chapter of the book of Judges, you read of the country of Laish, which five men, of the tribe of Dan, were sent by their brethren to survey; and of a city of that name, which they called Dan, after their father. The Laish, however, which is here spoken of, seems to have been another town, situated between Gallim and Anathoth, at no great distance from the former, otherwise the voice of

* Judges xix. 30.

lamentation in Gallim could not have reached it.—The prophet next commiserates the unhappy condition of the people of Anathoth. This was another of the cities, with her suburbs, which was given to the priests, the children of Aaron *. Being mentioned in the passage above cited, immediately after Gibeon and Gebah, it probably lay at no great distance from them. This city was renowned for having been the place of the prophet Jeremiah's nativity and residence. The compassionate manner wherein it is here addressed leads to suppose, that, at the time in which the Assyrians marched toward Jerusalem, the inhabitants were in a very deplorable condition.

31 Madmenah is removed, the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee.

These two places, so far as I know, are not mentioned in any other passage of scripture beside the one now before us. I shall therefore only remark, that they were probably cities or towns lying toward Jerusalem, on the north-west, in the same tract of country through which our prophet describes the Assyrian army taking their march toward the metropolis of Judea. Struck with terror at the approach of the enemy, the people of Madmenah removed from their habitations, and the inhabitants of Gebim were collected together, with the resolution of fleeing for safety.

32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand *against* the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

Nob was a city belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, not far from Jerusalem, and inhabited by the priests, as appears from the history of David, who went thither to visit Ahimelech the priest †. In this place the ark

* See Joshua xxi. 18.

† 1 Sam. xxi. 1.

of God remained for some time before it was taken to Gibeon; and here Sennacherib was to remain for a day, to refresh his troops, and prepare for the siege of the capital of Judea. The words of the Chaldee Paraphrast on this verse are remarkable, and worthy of attention. They are these: "Sennacherib came and stood in Nob, a city of the priests, before the walls of Jerusalem, and said to his army, Is not this the city Jerusalem, against which I have brought my whole army, having subdued all its provinces? Is it not small and weak in comparison of the fortifications of the Gentiles, which I have subdued by the valour of my hand? He stood nodding with his head, and wagging his hand up and down, as a man is wont to do when he despiseth any thing." This is a very simple and natural illustration of the words before us. The mount of the daughter of Zion, is a Hebrew phrase, equivalent, in our language, to the inhabitants of mount Zion; which, with the hill of Jerusalem, may be intended to signify those who resided both in the upper and lower parts of that city. Against them the prophet declares, that the king of Assyria shall shake his hand: thus intimating his strong displeasure, and determined purpose, to execute upon them terrible vengeance, on account of their opposition to his authority and government. In this sense of the expression, we read, 'That a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba by name, the son of Bichri, hath lift up or shaken his hand against the king, even against David *.' Against the holy city, which God had chosen for his habitation, and had hitherto defended by his providence, did the proud Assyrian monarch lift up his hand, threatening to destroy it; and, having marched his forces toward it, he was now going to try to carry his menaces into execution, and severely to punish the inhabitants for their obsti-

* 2 Sam. xx. 21.

nate resistance.—The fulfilment of this prediction you find written, 2 Chron. xxxii. 9. and following verses.—From the prophetic narration we have just considered, and its exact accomplishment, we learn, that all the movements of princes and great people, indeed of all men of every description, are from the beginning perfectly known unto God, and are under the direction and superintendence of his divine providence. He hath the most clear and accurate foreknowledge of all men, of all hearts, and of all actions; and most exactly foresees what men will be, and what they will do; what means they will employ, and what ends they will pursue. His omniscience extends to every creature, and penetrates into the inmost recesses of every heart. Whilst we admire and adore this foreknowledge of God, of which we have now seen a very striking instance, improve it to support you under all your infirmities, to comfort you under all your afflictions and dangers, and to animate you in performing the various services to which you may be called.—How terrible must be the approach of a great victorious army to the inhabitants of the towns and of the country against which they are marching! What fear and terror, what consternation and dread, must every where prevail among the people, whilst multitudes are trembling and crying with fright, and numbers, in the utmost precipitation and confusion, every where fleeing for safety from impending ruin! This consideration, suggested by what we have now been hearing, ought to excite us to thankfulness to God for the peace and safety which, through divine mercy, we enjoy, and a faithful improvement of the manifold advantages with which we are favoured.

33 Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature *shall be* hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled.

In

In this and the following verse, are represented the consequences with which the grand expedition of the Assyrian monarch should be followed.—The description is introduced with great majesty and solemnity, in order to excite the greater attention to the foretold event. The destruction of the Assyrian army is exhibited under the image of a great forest, consisting of many flourishing trees, with strong and high branches; yea, of Lebanon itself, covered with lofty cedars, but cut down, and laid level with the ground, by the hand of some powerful agent. The overthrow, which is the subject of this prediction, our prophet hath repeatedly mentioned; but as this wonderful event engaged his admiring attention, and took possession of his mind, he once more introduces it in this verse, where he affirms, that *the Lord of hosts shall lop the bough with terror*. The tree should not at once be cut down, but its principal branch, the vast army, which had stretched itself nearly so far as Jerusalem, was to be lopped off in a very awful manner, so as to strike terror into the whole empire.—*And the high ones of stature shall be hewn down*. The choicest and most elevated persons, such as the princes, the nobles, the generals, and officers, who occupied the most eminent stations in the state and in the army, were to be suddenly deprived of their dignity, and laid level with the meanest of the people.—*And the haughty shall be humbled*. After men have attained to high station, they often become insolent and haughty, forgetful of what they once were, of what they now are, and to whom they are indebted for their exaltation and dignity. Vast numbers of this description were doubtless in the Assyrian army and empire: and of such it is here foretold, they shall be humbled and brought low; their pride should receive a powerful check, and their condition be totally reversed.—This is the peculiar work of the Lord of hosts. No tree so great and strong, no bough so lofty, no man so elevated and proud, but the

the Lord of hosts can lay him low. Pharaoh, who was the highest bough in Egypt; Saul, who was the tallest branch in Israel; Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who was so lofty that his top is said to have reached to heaven; and the high ones in Assyria; were all hewn down by the omnipotent arm of Jehovah, and reduced to the most humiliating condition. Beware then of that pride which puffs up the mind with a vain conceit of one's self, on account of some real or imaginary excellence; which excites extravagant self-esteem and admiration; whilst it makes light of divine promises and threatenings, which, above all things, we ought most to respect.

34 And he shall cut down the thickets of the forests with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

The prophet having in part foretold the consequences with which the Assyrian expedition against Jerusalem should be attended, with respect to the chief men in the army, now declares, that it should be accompanied with similar effects to the common soldiers. These last were certainly the persons who were intended by the thickets of the forests, whom the Lord of hosts threatened to cut down with iron; not literally, but in the metaphorical sense of the expression. They should be suddenly cut down, and by one stroke as it were deprived of life, even as the grass or corn is laid down by the scythe with which it is mown.—*And Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.* Lebanon was a very high, beautiful, and fruitful mountain, in the land of Canaan. It had its name probably from its white appearance, its summit being almost continually covered with snow, and its sides with abundance of frankincense, which is of a whitish colour. Upon this celebrated mountain grew the largest and best of cedars, which of all timber is the most excellent, odoriferous, and durable. The frankincense and the cedars must have emitted a fine fragrant

grant smell, that would perfume the air, and render the neighbourhood exceeding pleasant and agreeable. With great propriety, therefore, is this mountain mentioned sometimes in scripture to denote a thriving and flourishing condition, as in Psal. xcii. 12. where it is affirmed, that ‘the righteous shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.’ The prosperous condition of the Assyrian troops, which, for beauty and grandeur, resembled the forest of Lebanon, was soon to be reversed by a mighty One, described, in the former part of this chapter, as the Angel of the Lord, the Light, and the holy One of Israel, whose supreme excellence and glory is celebrated by all the true Israel of God, who contemplate him as their Saviour and defence. The designation here given to this illustrious Person, plainly refers to that irresistible power of which he is possessed, who, in the fulness of time, was to come forth to accomplish the salvation of his church; and who, in performing this glorious work, was to afford the most satisfying evidence that he is mighty to save. He is indeed a very great and renowned Conqueror, who always prevails, and succeeds in every enterprise. To him every divine perfection is ascribed in scripture; and, among other characters, he claims that of Almighty, which he nobly displays in establishing and preserving his church, and in vanquishing all the many powerful enemies of his people.— Having omitted to point out the proper improvement that you ought to make of several articles contained in the above prediction, permit me to conclude with a remark or two, of which I hope you will perceive the justice, and feel the influence.

Remark, first, that the ambition, avarice, and lust of conquest in princes and great men, is a restless, turbulent, and dangerous disposition, often attended with the worst of consequences. This observation we have seen remarkably verified in our progress through this chapter. Such is human nature in its present state, that even those who are exalted to eminent station,

tion, and dignified with the highest honours, are seldom contented with their condition. Habakkuk the prophet thus describes a Chaldean prince, whose character is not uncommon: ‘ He keepeth not at home, ‘ he enlargeth his desire as hell, and as death cannot ‘ be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and ‘ heapeth unto him all people:—wo to him that ‘ increaseth that which is not his * :’ in this way he cannot possibly add to real enjoyment. Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, having enlarged his dominions by the conquest of Macedonia, was bent upon subduing Italy, and adding it to his empire. Asking the advice of his counsellor Cineas, he inquired at the prince, What he meant to do after he conquered Italy? Next, said he, I mean to invade Sicily, which is a rich and powerful country, and not far off. When you have got Sicily, said Cineas, what then? Africa, replied the king, containing many fine kingdoms, is at no great distance, and through my renown, and the valour of my troops, I may subdue them. Be it so, said the counsellor: When you have vanquished the kingdoms of Africa, what will you do then? Pyrrhus answered, Then you and I will be merry, and have good cheer. Cineas replied, Sir, if this be the end at which you aim, what need you venture your life, your honour, your kingdoms, and all that you have, to purchase what you already possess. Epirus and Macedonia are sufficient to make you and me merry: had you all the world, you could not be more merry, nor have better cheer. From such instances of foolish insatiable ambition, learn the wisdom and necessity of the pleasant exercise of contentment with such things as you have; for if you are not satisfied with them, you would not be content in any other condition.

Remark again, that God frequently disappoints men of the objects of their expectation, and frustrates

* Hab. ii. 5, 6.

their attempts to acquire the riches and honours of this world, whilst he exalts to safety, opulence, and grandeur, those who looked not for such advancement. In the words of Job, ‘ God leadeth princes away ‘ spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty *.’ Ahab, king of Israel, failed in his attempt to possess the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, and was killed in battle. The kings of Edom and Moab, of Ammon and Amalek, with the Philistines, conspired to cut off the people of God from being a nation; but God was pleased to write confusion and disappointment upon all their hostile exertions for this purpose. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, went up to the very gates of Jerusalem, to spoil and devour its inhabitants; yet, after all his great preparations and threatenings, he was obliged to return with shame to his own land, where he was slain by his own sons; and upon his tomb the following inscription is said to have been engraven: “ Let every one that seeth me, learn to “ fear God, and not to defy him as I have done †.”— We may farther remark, that the Most High often exalts to safety, opulence, and grandeur, those who expected not such promotion. Saul, the son of Kish, when seeking for his father’s asses, found a kingdom. Joseph, from being a prisoner, was advanced to be governor over all the land of Egypt. David was taken from feeding his father’s flock, to feed and govern the kingdom of Israel. And the people of Judah, at the time to which the above prophecy referred, were wonderfully delivered from impending danger, and raised to a safe and comfortable condition. Thus doth the Almighty defeat the purposes of the crafty; and raiseth up the poor out of the dust, that he may set them with princes. Would you then, my brethren, happily escape those vexatious crosses accidents which might disturb your enjoyment of what you presently possess, and rise superior to those disap-

* Job xii. 19.

† Herod. lib. ii.

pointments which are ready to stun with surprise, or overwhelm the mind with amazement? Steer your course with a steady hand; mark the interposition of divine providence in your prosperity, and in your depression; and attempt no design without acknowledging God, and looking to him to crown your endeavours with success. To conclude, let us unite with the people of God in ancient times, in grateful acknowledgment of that almighty hand to which we, as well as they, are indebted for every deliverance, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature; and, in imitation of the saints above, ascribe salvation to God, and to the Lamb.

PRELIMI-

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE prophet here begins the fifth section of this long prophetic discourse. Having contemplated, in the overthrow of Assyria, the destruction of every adverse power to the kingdom of God, and having viewed, in the prosperity and felicity of Hezekiah's reign, an image of the happiness and glory of the kingdom of Jesus Christ after the conquest of its formidable enemies, overlooking its intermediate fortunes, he proceeds to delineate the rise, the amiable qualifications, and illustrious actions of the great Messiah. After which, he represents the œconomy, the peace, the extent, the glory, and the other properties and future fortunes of his kingdom, with their consequences. To these descriptions he subjoins a hymn of gratitude, in which the church is introduced celebrating the praises of their God and Saviour, on account of the great salvation in which they participate. This pleasing prospect our prophet presented to the view of those who were looking for redemption in Israel; and, by the predictions that he delivered on this subject, he administered the most agreeable consolation to their hearts, and furnishes the people of God in all ages with a delightful topic of useful meditation and discourse.—This chapter may be distributed into the following parts: The humble descent, the eminent gifts, and peculiar excellencies of the illustrious Prince, who forms the chief subject of this prophecy, are particularly specified, ver. 1.—5. The gentle, peaceable, and flourishing condition of his extensive kingdom, collected from among different nations, is next displayed in beautiful figurative language, ver. 6.—9. The conversion of the Gentiles, and the vocation of the dispersed Jews to the glorious privileges belonging to his vast empire, are then foretold, ver. 10.—14. The chapter concludes with representing the subversion of the hostile king-

doms of Egypt and Assyria, and the awful demonstrations of the divine righteousness which was to accompany the great work of divine grace, ver. 15. and 16.

CHAP. XI.

AND there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

In these words the nativity of the renowned Prince is foretold, in whom the following predictions were to receive their accomplishment.——Having announced the certain destruction of the Assyrian army, under the image of a great forest cut down by some powerful hand, the prophet proceeds, in figurative terms, corresponding to the language of the former prophecy, to foretel his birth and lineal descent, to whom belong the after-mentioned glorious prerogatives, representing his appearance as a slender stem, shooting out from the trunk of an old tree that was cut down and decayed. This tender plant, though weak to human view, should nevertheless grow and flourish, and become exceedingly fruitful. This contrast points out the connection between this and the foregoing chapter, expressed by the connecting particle with which it begins. A remarkable instance here occurs of the method frequently adopted by Isaiah, and the other prophets, of taking occasion, from some great temporal deliverance they have mentioned, of introducing the spiritual salvation of God's people by the mighty One, on whom our help is laid. That this prophecy relates to Messiah the Prince, I hesitate not to affirm, upon the express authority of the apostle Paul; who, when preaching to the men of Antioch, declared, 'That of the seed of David the
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‘ son of Jesse, God hath, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus *.’ And when shewing that the Gentiles ought to glorify God for his mercy, in raising up for them a Saviour, he quotes the words now before us: ‘ Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in him shall the Gentiles trust †.’ By this sacred testimony, I am fully justified in applying this prophecy to Jesus Christ the Son of God, the splendour and glory of whose kingdom is foretold in this chapter. I think that I am also vindicated in making this application, by the description which Jesus Christ assumes to himself, when ‘ he sent his angel to testify unto you these things in the churches: I am (said he) the root and offspring of David ‡;’ where, if I mistake not, there is a manifest allusion to the description given of the Prince of peace in this prediction, who, according to the scriptures, lineally descended from that illustrious patriarch. I proceed, therefore, to explain and illustrate the figurative representation given of the nativity and extraction of our mighty Saviour, and glorious king.

And there shall come forth a rod, &c. In the preceding chapter, the Assyrian was spoken of as the rod of God’s anger, wherewith he corrected his people for their sins; and as a strong bough, which the Lord was to lop with terror. In this chapter, the great Messiah is spoken of as the rod whereby Jehovah was to feed, lead, and govern his people, to afford them protection and deliverance, support and consolation. Like the rod of God which Moses was commanded to take in his hand, when employed in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, this rod was to perform many signs and wonders in the sight of the people. Like the rod of Aaron, that blossomed and bare fruit, this rod was to appear beautiful, and to bear fruit for the cure and the food of the nations of

* Acts xiii. 22, 23. † Rom. xv. 12. ‡ Rev. xxii. 16.

them that are saved. By this rod of God's strength, Satan was vanquished, and divested of the possession of the human heart; the turbulent passions of the wicked are subdued; the word of reconciliation, the gospel of salvation, was published; the children of God, that were scattered abroad, are gathered together in one, kept from falling, and presented faultless before the presence of God's glory with exceeding joy. By this rod, they are sustained under all the pressures of sin, of a wounded spirit, and a decayed body, under the crushing weight of temptations, reproaches, and the dreaded calamities of the valley of the shadow of death; their injuries are revenged, their enemies repelled, and their felicity secured.—

With no less propriety is the Messiah foretold as a branch which was to grow out of the stock of the Jewish fathers, from whom, according to ancient prophecy, he was to proceed. Like Isaac, he was remarkably the Son of the promise, raised up by divine power, when human expectation had almost perished. His first appearance, like that of a branch, was mean and inconsiderable, totally destitute of external pomp and magnificence. He sprung up from the family of David, after it was reduced very low, and there remained not one king or prince belonging to it that might preside over the Jewish nation. Eminently possessed of life and vigour, he increased in stature and wisdom: he flourished with the most amiable gifts and graces; and, from the whole gospel-history, we learn, that he was abundantly filled with the richest and the most excellent fruits. How sublime, how truly divine the doctrine which he inculcated! How stupendous the miracles that he performed, which excited the admiration of the spectators! who exclaimed, 'Is not this the son of David?' In his whole conduct, in every condition, and in every place, he displayed consummate wisdom united with perfect holiness: all his words and actions discovered that excellent spirit, and supreme authority of which he was possessed.

possessed. His influence and renown extended gradually over the earth, and spread far and wide; so that under his shadow multitudes resorted, who enjoyed the most agreeable refreshment, and were delighted with his pleasant fruits.—Sensible of our unspeakable need of the great Redeemer, let us highly prize him, particularly in the view in which he is here exhibited; and let us have immediate recourse to him, that we may enjoy comfortable repose under this branch of righteousness, be screened from the scorching heat of that fire which might consume us, and feast upon those precious fruits of which, by virtue of interest in him, we may participate.—This rod and branch our prophet foretels,

Shall come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and shall grow out of his roots. The illustrious Person intended by the rod mentioned in this verse, should arise from among the posterity of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, the father of David king of Israel, by whose name the Messiah is sometimes called in the scriptures of the Old Testament. This branch is promised to grow out of his roots, to proceed from the great progenitors of Jesse and David; among whom were Boaz, Amminadab, and Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, with other renowned ‘fathers, of whom, concerning ‘the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed ‘for ever*.’ The expressions I am considering, plainly refer to the doctrine uniformly taught in the sacred writings concerning the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, ‘That he was made of the seed of ‘David according to the flesh †.’ Indeed he is often described in terms designed to excite the most grand and magnificent ideas, as being superior to angels and men; far above all principality and power; above all that is accounted great in heaven and in earth; the only begotten Son of the eternal Father; the heir of all things, by whom he made the worlds; the

* Rom. ix. 5.

† Rom. i. 3.

brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person. Words cannot convey more exalted ideas of his transcendent dignity, supreme excellence, and infinite glory. He is nevertheless sometimes spoken of as being of mortal extraction; and the tribe, the family, and the persons, from whom he should arise, are accurately marked, of which a remarkable instance lies now before us. Of such vast importance is this truth in the Christian system, that the apostle Peter, when preaching on the day of Pentecost to the men of Judea, introduced this subject as an article of his discourse: ‘David (said he) being a prophet, and
 ‘ knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him,
 ‘ that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh,
 ‘ he would raise up Christ, to sit on his throne, as it
 ‘ is written, Psal. cxxxii. 11.*’ The apostle Paul repeatedly inculcates the same doctrine, as worthy of serious attention, and frequent consideration: ‘Re-
 ‘ member (saith he) that Jesus Christ, of the seed of
 ‘ David, was raised from the dead †.’ The expressions used in the inspired volume on this subject clearly shew, that the divine agency was peculiarly employed in the wonderful work of the Word being made flesh; and that this mystery consists in the assumption of that human nature, which sprung from the stem of Jesse and his roots, into the most intimate connection with the Son of God. This circumstance points out the royal descent of the Messiah; and evinces the inviolable faithfulness of God, in accomplishing the predictions and promises delivered to the church under the Old Testament. By taking flesh unto him, this glorious Person became capable of suffering for the sins of his people, of compassionating them in their sufferings, of interceding in their behalf, and of acting, in every respect, as a Saviour suited to relieve all our necessities.

* Acts ii. 30.

† 2 Tim. ii. 8.

2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the LORD.

Having, in figurative language, foretold the nativity of Jesus Christ, and the family from which he should arise, the prophet proceeds to specify some of the divine gifts and splendid ornaments of which the Messiah should be possessed, and which he was to display with the brightest lustre among men.—The first of these is thus expressed: *The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.* The Holy Spirit, who with the Father and Son is one God, seems to be here intended, to whom the anointing of the man whose name is the Branch is attributed in various passages of scripture. He is called the Spirit, to intimate, that he is perfectly pure and incorporeal; that all existences derive their life, spirit, and activity from him; and that it is his peculiar office to convey spirit and life into men dead in trespasses and sins. In the language of inspiration, this Spirit is said to create, and give life; to speak by the prophets, and to appoint ministers in the church; to help infirmities, and to teach all things; to guide into all truth, to reprove and comfort, and to abide with his people for ever. These assertions, with many others of a similar nature that occur in the Bible, serve to shew, that the Spirit of Jehovah is an intelligent Being, and a divine Agent. In the words before us, he is foretold to rest upon him who is the rod that grew out of the roots of Jesse. All his operations respecting men, are either transitory, and of short continuance; such was his divine influence felt by Gideon, Jephthah, and Saul the son of Kish: or permanent, and of long duration; such is his residence in the faithful, with whom he abides so as not to leave them. In this manner he is here promised to rest upon Jesus Christ, even as the symbol of the divine glory rested of old upon the tent of the congregation.

gation*. By the Spirit of the Lord, he was consecrated to the sacred office in which he was invested; and perfectly qualified for sustaining the high character in which he was to act, and for performing all the promises of grace respecting the redemption of the church. By this Spirit, he was abundantly furnished for accomplishing the whole of the arduous work which he engaged to execute; and, therefore, the Spirit is said to have descended and abode upon him, as here predicted †; and he is said to have been ‘full of the Spirit ‡.’ This was the oil of gladness where-with he was anointed above his fellows; for ‘God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him ||. The apostle Peter explicitly affirmed, in his discourse before Cornelius and his friends, ‘That God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost, and with power;’ and our Saviour himself acknowledged, in the synagogue of Nazareth, that the Spirit of the Lord God was upon him. Innumerable testimonies might be added in confirmation of the fulfilment of this prediction, which it is unnecessary to recite.—The Spirit of the Lord, which rested upon the Messias, still rests upon his people, who, to a man, rejoice that they have not received the spirit of the world, nor the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit which is of God. Have you not, in manifold instances, Christians, experienced this comfortable truth? Hath not he filled your minds with the knowledge of necessary divine truths when you were in uncertainty and perplexity? Hath not he subdued your corrupt dispositions, and introduced into your souls those amiable graces in which you resemble your divine Master. Hath not he sanctified your affections, preventing them from being entangled with worldly objects, and directing them to things heavenly and eternal? Hath not he strengthened you with all might in the inward man

* See Exod. xl. 34, 35. † John i. 32. ‡ Luke iv. 1.
 || John iii. 34.

when you were weak and feeble, and poured into your disconsolate hearts the most reviving consolations.

The spirit of wisdom. The first of the six qualifications of which the illustrious Person, who is the subject of this prophecy, should be possessed, by the Spirit of the Lord, is wisdom. Anciently wisdom was employed to signify exquisite skill in any art or science; in after-times it was appropriated to those who were devoted to the contemplation of the most sublime objects, by acquaintance with which they were distinguished from the bulk of mankind, and furnished for becoming their instructors. Among us that man is reckoned to be wise, who makes choice of the best ends, and employs the most proper means in order to attain them;—who, with caution and prudence, embraces every opportunity of carrying into execution the good purposes which he hath deliberately formed;—who governs his passions with moderation;—who conducts his affairs with discretion, and acts with propriety in the station assigned him by providence, performing with fidelity and diligence the business in which he is occupied. By the spirit of wisdom promised to the Messiah in his human character, he was perfectly acquainted with the divine nature and glorious perfections of Jehovah, his gracious counsels, his wonderful works and dispensations, in their order, connection, and design. He was likewise instructed in the offices he was to execute, according to the divine appointment; and the way by which, according to the purposes of grace, sinners of mankind may obtain complete salvation, with eternal glory, in the presence and enjoyment of God, whose favour is better than life. He had a thorough acquaintance with the state of the world, the œconomy of the church, and the manner in which it might be best administered, agreeably to its various conditions, and the several stages through which it was to pass. By this spirit of wisdom, he was fully qualified to make known

the whole counsel of God, to instruct men in the knowledge of every necessary divine truth, to shew them the way of salvation, to give them the most excellent precepts and perfect example, whereby they might be directed in the way of life and felicity. Hereby he was directed in the performance of the arduous work which he appeared on earth to execute: he was enabled to confound those who thought that they were wise; to instruct his followers, so as to make them wise unto salvation; to speak a word in season to the weary, and effectually to repair the injured honour of the divine government.—This spirit, which was plentifully communicated to the Head, was intended to descend and diffuse itself over his whole body mystical. It is not a natural endowment, or a natural faculty, essential to the human soul; ‘but
 ‘ comes down from above, is pure, peaceable, gentle,
 ‘ and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good
 ‘ fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy *.’ It teaches to desist from the pursuit of lying vanities, and to acquire, by the most proper means, the most glorious and sublime enjoyments. Deeply sensible then that you greatly need this wisdom, have immediate recourse to him in whom are deposited all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and earnestly ask it of God, and it shall be given you.

And understanding, or prudence, as the word also signifies. In some places of scripture, wisdom and understanding denote nearly the same thing, as in the following proverb: ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and to depart from evil is understanding.’ In other passages, some distinction seems to be made between these gifts or endowments, as in the proverb which saith, ‘With him that hath understanding wisdom is to be found.’ Though between these two qualifications of mind there is an intimate connection, and the one is frequently includ-

* James iii. 17.

ed in the other, yet, in the verse under consideration, understanding or prudence seems to denote somewhat different from wisdom. The spirit of wisdom relates chiefly to divine truths, whereas the spirit of understanding principally respects holy practice and good conduct. Understanding consists in an accurate discernment of the relation, excellence, and importance of the various objects which present themselves to view, and a clear perception of their real worth and utility, so as to distinguish them from their counterfeits and opposites. It teaches to reject with disdain whatever is bad or unprofitable, and to approve of whatever is valuable and useful, according to their comparative excellence, in preference to every thing that stands in competition with them. Prudence applies to practice the maxims of wisdom; determines, with respect to time, place, and measure, what is to be done, and what is not to be done; what evils, vices, and dangers are to be avoided; what things, that are good, virtuous, and laudable, ought to be performed in every circumstance and condition. Of this spirit of understanding and prudence, one of the noblest endowments and chief excellencies which can adorn human nature, Jesus Christ was to be eminently possessed, according to this prediction. Furnished with this brightest ornament, it shone forth with un sullied lustre in his every action; and, on every occasion, displayed itself so as to attract the admiration not only of his friends, but of his enemies. Read, read attentively the history of Jesus Christ recorded in the gospels, and you shall find the most illustrious proofs of the spirit of understanding here promised to him that ever were exhibited to the view of mankind.—This spirit too runs down from the Head upon all those who compose his body the church, enabling them aright to understand, esteem, and practise the perfect rules of righteousness contained in the word of God, and from the best principles and motives to become obedient to their highest Lord. It communicates a
divine

divine skill and ability to perform every commanded duty; and, therefore, the apostle Paul informed the faithful brethren to whom he wrote, ‘ That he ceased
 ‘ not to pray that they might be filled with the know-
 ‘ ledge of God’s will, in all wisdom and spiritual un-
 ‘ derstanding; that they might walk worthy of the
 ‘ Lord unto all pleasing*. Give me understanding,
 ‘ O Lord, and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall ob-
 ‘ serve it with my whole heart †.’

The spirit of counsel. Though this spirit bears a remarkable affinity to that of wisdom and understanding, and is intimately connected with it, there is notwithstanding a considerable difference between them. Counsel, you know, consists in serious deliberate consultation, accompanied with wholesome advice respecting measures proper to be adopted, and designs which ought to be carried into execution. In this view, it must be given by some, and accepted by others, that it may become truly beneficial. By the spirit of counsel promised to the Messiah, to whose direction he should faithfully attend, he was to be perfectly qualified for giving the best and most salutary advices to those who consult him, how they ought to behave, and what they ought to do in all their perplexities and difficulties. By this spirit, he should be admirably fitted for the necessary work of directing them in the way to eternal salvation, and possessed of all those abilities that are requisite to enable him to give the wisest counsels to those who ask them, sensible of their necessities. He was hereby furnished with the most accurate knowledge of the true way of salvation, the most intimate acquaintance with human nature, the clearest discernment of mens duty and interest, with ability to convey his instructions in the most convincing manner, and to recommend his counsels by the most affecting and powerful motives. He should not only promulgate laws as the King of Zion, and incul-

* Col. i. 9, 10.

† Psal. cxix. 34.

cate his doctrine as the Master of Israel, but, as it were laying aside his authority, and assuming the agreeable character of a friend, he kindly condescends to teach and assist with the most engaging familiarity and tender affection. He therefore thus speaks of himself: ‘ I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find
 ‘ out knowledge of witty inventions. Counsel is
 ‘ mine, and found wisdom: I am understanding, I
 ‘ have strength*.’ In the Psalms, he is introduced giving solemn thanks to Jehovah, for that divine counsel and direction which at all times was afforded him: ‘ I will bless the Lord, who hath given me
 ‘ counsel †.’—This amiable benevolent spirit descends from the Head to all the members, and happily disposes them to comply with the salutary advices he is pleased to give in every condition. You cannot possibly receive direction that is once to be compared to his unerring counsel, so safe, so suited to your circumstances, and attended with such important advantages. ‘ Hear instruction then, and be wise, and refuse it not ‡;’ and he will guide you by his counsel, and afterward receive you to glory.

And might. The Hebrew word denotes strength and firmness, fortitude and constancy of mind, founded upon an unshaken confidence in the goodness, faithfulness, and other divine perfections of Jehovah. This Spirit of might, with the undaunted magnanimity which he inspires, were indispensably necessary to the illustrious Person who is the subject of this prediction, that he might execute with honour and success the work that was given him to do:—that he might demonstrate the truth and efficacy of the doctrine which he taught, convince the gainsayers, and silence the adversaries who opposed him; resolve the difficulties, and reply to the objections that were proposed to him; and oblige all to acknowledge, that his word was with power, and that they were unable

* Prov. viii. 12. 14.

† Psal. xvi. 7.

‡ Prov. viii. 33.

to resist the Spirit by which he spake:—that he might resolutely sustain the envy and hatred, the insults and injuries, the complicated sufferings and ignominious death, to which he should be exposed on account of his fidelity, in reprovng the prevailing vices of the times, for the sake of the truth and glory of God, and the salvation of men:—that he might perform the most astonishing miracles, as incontestable proofs of his saving power, as convincing evidences of his divine mission, and the truth of the doctrine which he was commissioned to promulgate, and taught with authority:—and that he might vanquish all the formidable enemies of his kingdom, who acted in combination against him, by the excruciating death to which, for that purpose, he was, according to the counsel of Jehovah, to submit. All this arduous work was to be done, ‘not by might, nor by power, but by ‘my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*.’—This Spirit of might is not confined to the Head of the church, but is extended to all who are united to him, and participate of the grace of God in truth. Though in themselves without strength, yet, by the effectual working of his power, according to the grace of God given unto them, and the riches of his glory, they are strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man †. Such, my brethren, is the levity and inconstancy of our nature; such our inability to resist temptations, and proneness to backslide from God; such is the malice, the power, the subtilty, and number of our spiritual enemies, that, unless we are strengthened and supported by the Spirit of might, we cannot be steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Earnestly and frequently implore from God, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, this spiritual might, that thereby your faith and hope, your patience and constancy of mind, may be increased and established.

* Zech. iv. 6.

† Eph. iii. 7. 16.

The spirit of knowledge. The knowledge spoken of, must be that which is accompanied with love and affection. In this sense it is often mentioned in scripture; so that to know and to love the name of the Lord seem to be synonymous terms, employed to describe one and the same character, of which you may be satisfied by comparing together Psal. ix. 10. with Psal. v. 11. Knowledge and affection are closely connected together, and have a strong reciprocal influence upon each other. Indeed the connection between the knowledge and the love of God is most intimate and inseparable; for it is impossible to love him, unless he is known; and if he is properly known, it is equally impossible not to love him. Upon this obvious principle, the apostle Paul affirms, 'If a man love God, the same is known of him*.' The terms in which this proposition are expressed, are convertible into either of the following forms, both of which are of the same import: If a man love God, the same is loved by him; or if a man know God, the same is known by him. The spirit of knowledge and love here promised to the Messiah, is that excellent disposition of mind whereby he was to contemplate God as his Father, to whom he would yield the most grateful and prompt obedience, whose favour he would desire with the most intense affection, in communion with whom he would place his chief delight, whose approbation he would strenuously endeavour to enjoy, and whose glory he would assiduously strive to advance. This amiable spirit our Lord Jesus Christ eminently possessed, of which the most striking proofs are recorded by the evangelists in the New Testament. He perfectly knew the Father; and revealed him unto men: he perfectly knew the mind of the Lord; and communicated it unto us: he perfectly loved the Father; and, therefore, as the Father gave him commandment, so he did, and so he spake.—

* 1 Cor. viii. 3.

When this spirit of knowledge and love takes possession of the subjects of Jesus Christ, their minds are illuminated to perceive the excellence, connection, and design of divine revelation: and the love of God is shed abroad into their hearts, which presides over their other graces as a prince among his people; and from which, as from a living fountain, proceeds the whole work and labour of love. Diligently endeavour then to grow in knowledge, and to improve it, for exciting you to the vigorous exercise of divine love, by which you may resemble your blessed Master, and adorn your holy profession.

And of the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord may here denote the devout affection of reverence, which arises in the mind by means of the contemplation of the grandeur and dominion, the power and righteousness, with the other divine excellencies of Jehovah. It adores his greatness; it venerates his purity; it respects his omniscience; it does homage to his goodness; it stands in awe of his power; it honours his justice, and is solicitous to avoid his displeasure. It is such a profound reverence for God as is accompanied with love, and a becoming concern to yield an exact obedience to all his commands: it resembles the affection which a dutiful son discovers toward his esteemed parent, and faithful subjects entertain for a good prince. When this principle of the fear of the Lord reigns in the heart, it produces the most powerful effects, and hath an extensive happy influence over all the purposes, affections, desires, and actions. It dispels the fear of man that bringeth a snare, and renders superior to all the threatenings and terrors of the world: it restrains from sin, and closely adheres to God, and his ways: it renders cautious and circumspect, and proves the watchful guardian of the heart: it presides in every act of worship, and excites to the performance of every duty that may please the Lord. This filial fear and reverence of Jehovah, is the fruit of the Spirit; the offspring

spring of faith, whereby it is cherished; the concomitant of love, which preserves it from degenerating into slavish dread; the companion of hope, which it keeps from falling into presumption, whilst hope preserves fear from sinking into despair: it qualifies joy, and keeps it from levity, whilst joy shews that fear is genuine, and of the right kind. Such was the spirit of reverence and fear of the Lord which was promised to the Messiah, of which he was eminently possessed, as is abundantly evident from the gospel-history, where many instances of its amiable influence are recorded.—With the same spirit of veneration for God, and unfeigned piety, are the subjects of his kingdom in some measure endowed; and under its influence, they perform the various acts of divine worship, which are preparatory to their entrance within the veil, whither Jesus Christ their Forerunner is already gone. Let this fear of the Lord be your treasure.—Review the whole prediction contained in this verse, and see how admirably the great Redeemer must be qualified, by the accomplishment of these promises, for performing the work assigned him, and perfecting the human character. Wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, were all united in the Author of our salvation: and, through him, the same spirit is communicated to us, to cure us of our folly; to enable us to discern all necessary truth; to conduct us in the paths of righteousness; to strengthen us with all might for actual service, and dutiful submission; to furnish our minds with knowledge and love, that may afford us comfortable experience in the ways of God; and to grant us the fear of the Lord, which is a powerful principle of all holy obedience.

3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD, and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears.

In this verse, the admirable fitness of the Messiah is represented, for gathering together the people of whom his kingdom shall be comprised, and for administering the affairs of his government.—That he might perform aright this great and difficult work, the Spirit of Jehovah, which was to rest upon him, should make him of quick understanding, and furnish him with a penetrating discernment, whereby he was at once clearly to perceive who were the most proper persons to be admitted to his patronage, and the privileges of his dutiful subjects. This faculty was to proceed from the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, and the intimate connection of our Lord's human nature with the Godhead; in consequence of which, he should be perfectly acquainted with the secrets of all hearts, and have no need that any should testify to him what is in man. He was to be of quick scent or smell, according to the translation of the Hebrew word in the margin of some of your Bibles, so as to perceive the fear of the Lord wherever it could be found; and, like the sacrifices of old, with which God was well pleased, it should prove an odour of a sweet smell, and an acceptable offering. This prediction was fully verified in our Lord Jesus Christ, who was of such quick discernment and acute understanding, in the dispositions of the human heart, that he could infallibly determine with respect to mens characters, of which some memorable instances are recorded in the New Testament. Such was his penetrating sagacity, that, at first sight, he could easily discover a true Israelite, in whom was the fear of the Lord, from those that were wicked, hypocritical, or formal, and destitute of this internal qualification. ‘When he saw Nathanael
 ‘coming to him, he said of him, Behold an Israelite
 ‘indeed, in whom is no guile.—Before (added he)
 ‘that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the
 ‘fig-tree, I saw thee *;’ employed, it may be, in

* John i. 47, 48.

pouring out his soul in secret before the Lord. He shewed that he was perfectly acquainted with the character of the woman who was a sinner, who came and ministered to him with great humility and tenderness, and that he needed no information with respect to her past conduct. According to this prophecy, the Messias, in admitting persons into his kingdom, was not to have respect to their external advantages, their descent, or their riches, their reputation and condition in the world, or their exterior appearances of feigned piety; but to judge of them simply by their fear and reverence of the Lord, which forms the beauty of the inward man, and is inseparably connected with every other divine grace, and the exercises of dutiful obedience to God.—Convinced, my friends, that hypocrisy and formality are of no avail in his sight, we ought seriously and impartially to examine, if we are possessed of this important disposition, which is essentially necessary to the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom.

And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. The scriptures represent the great Redeemer of mankind under a variety of characters, and ascribe to him various offices, which, though insufficient fully to exhibit his real excellence, when conjoined, assist in forming such exalted ideas of his glory as we can attain in this present state. In the words before us, impartial judgment, and equitable reproof, are foretold to be administered by him. In the exercise of his penetrating judgment, he was impartially to pronounce upon the characters of those who were to be admitted to participate in the privileges of his people, to determine according to the perfect rules of equity the differences that might arise among them respecting their conduct and interests, to defend them from the injuries to which they might be exposed, and to avenge the wrongs which they sustained. By the reproof which he should administer, he was to make the most important

portant and interesting discoveries: he was to operate powerful convictions of the truth of his doctrine, established upon the most complete evidence: he was to stop the mouths of adversaries; and sharply to rebuke those who obstinately refused, contrary to reason and justice, to submit their understandings to his instructions, to yield their hearts to his love, and their lives to the obedience of his laws.—This judgment and reproof the Messiah should dispense, without regard to uncertain reports, or to mens exterior appearance and condition in the world. To judge after the sight of the eyes, is to proceed and decide without respect to the rules laid down in the law of God, necessary to be observed in the exercise of righteous judgment. That law required, that no one ought to judge but those invested with authority; that every decision should be regulated by the law; and, after the matter had been impartially examined, and the case maturely considered, sentence should be pronounced, without regard to the rank and circumstances of the parties. When acting in his judicial capacity, Jesus Christ was to keep perfectly clear of the danger of which he cautioned his hearers, and the practice strictly prohibited in the law of God, which he severely reprov'd when he stood in the midst of the Jewish judges. Judge not (said he) according to the appearance, the sight, or countenance, but judge righteous judgment.—To reprove after the hearing of the ears, is to be influenced and directed in performing this important work by vague uncertain reports, or by injurious malicious representations, than which there is not any thing that affords more precarious and frivolous grounds of administering reproof. The Messiah was never to be misled by fallacious representations of persons principles and practices, nor seduced into error by the specious insinuations, and feeble vindications of malice or prejudice; but, in the whole business of reproof, he was to act uniformly, without regard to these and other
similar

similar circumstances. Many instances of the most unbiaſſed exerciſe of judgment and reproof preſent themſelves to view in the hiſtory of our bleſſed Saviour's miniſtry, which we may conſider as the accompliſhment of this prediction.—Would you then reſemble Jeſus Chriſt in your humble ſphere? Take heed that, in delivering your ſentiments, as well as in your actions, you be not improperly ſwayed by the external condition of thoſe whoſe characters and conduct come under your review. Beware of extolling thoſe who rather deſerve cenſure, and of condemning thoſe who ought to receive your commendation. My
 ‘ brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt,
 ‘ the Lord of glory, with reſpect of perſons *.—If
 ‘ ye have reſpect to perſons, ye commit ſin, and are
 ‘ convinced of the law as tranſgreſſors †.’

4 But with righteouſneſs ſhall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity, for the meek of the earth: and he ſhall ſmite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips ſhall he ſlay the wicked.

The ſubject which was introduced in the foregoing verſe is here illuſtrated and amplified. Having foretold that the Meſſiah would not pay improper regard to ſpecious appearances, and uncertain reports, our prophet poſitively declares the rules by which his procedure ſhould be conducted, and the characters of the perſons among whom he ſhould exerciſe the functions in which he was to be employed.—The whole of our Lord's government was to be managed with conſummate righteouſneſs, and perfect equity. Invested with ſupreme authority, and having all power in heaven and in earth committed to him, all his admonitions, precepts, and deciſions, were to be founded in righteouſneſs, and eſtabliſhed in the ſtricteſt juſtice; and, therefore, the

* James ii. 1.

† James ii. 9.

obedience he requires, is, with great propriety, called a reasonable service. All his laws were to be holy, just, and good; requiring only those things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, accompanied with promises of gracious assistance, and a glorious reward. And every portion of authority which he hath delegated to men, is conferred for the very purpose of teaching others to observe whatsoever he hath commanded.—*The poor and the meek of the earth*, are the characters of the subjects of the Messiah's spiritual kingdom, whom he judges with righteousness, and for whose sakes he reproves with equity. To persons of these descriptions, he assigns the kingdom of heaven, in his memorable discourse delivered from a mountain in Galilee: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven *.' The apostle James calls our attention to this circumstance: 'Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him †?' Indeed the church, composed of the disciples of Christ, are called the congregation of the poor, being poor not only in spirit, but often likewise in their worldly condition. By admitting the poor into his kingdom, Jesus Christ nobly displays the riches of his adorable grace, to which this distinguishing favour must be wholly ascribed: he makes ample compensation for external poverty, by internal riches: he preserves the indigent from manifold temptations, and conforms them to that condition in which he appeared in this world.—The meek of the earth are possessed of a humble and teachable disposition of mind, ready to receive divine instruction without prejudice, and cordially to submit to the authority of the great Prophet of the Lord, who is anointed to preach good tidings to the meek. This excellent qualification of the Messiah's subjects is necessary not only to receive the ingrafted word, which is

* Matth. v. 3.

† James ii. 5.

able to save their souls, but to resign themselves wholly to his disposal, to regulate their turbulent uneasy passions, to preserve them in an agreeable tranquillity amidst repeated provocations, and to dispose them to live inoffensively in the world. When, therefore, Christians are directed to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, they are required to exercise ‘all lowliness and meekness*.’ Such are the persons whom Jesus Christ pronounces blessed: for they shall inherit the earth, so much of the good things of this life as shall prove to them a real blessing. For their sakes, he who is their Lord and Protector, is ready to rise to judgment to save them, and he will reprove with equity. Most people are averse to reprove: some are afraid, and others are unable to perform this difficult work; whereas the illustrious Person who is here spoken of, is not afraid of man: for this end also he is possessed of consummate ability, and shews himself ever ready, on every proper occasion, to discharge this office with the utmost skill and effect.—Many remarkable instances of the accomplishment of this prediction are written in the New Testament. How righteously did he judge, how equitably did he reprove the Scribes and Pharisees, the woman of Canaan, and many others, I stay not to mention!—Consider poverty and meekness of spirit as most excellent dispositions, absolutely requisite to form the amiable temper of the subjects of the Redeemer’s kingdom; and diligently use every instituted mean, in dependence upon the divine blessing, to acquire these lovely ornaments of the mind. Seek meekness from the Author of every good and perfect gift: behold it exemplified in Jesus Christ, of whom you ought to learn to be meek and lowly in heart. Rest not satisfied until you have attained these Christian graces, which are the fruits of the Spirit; and employ every prudent precaution to avoid the opposite passions.

* Eph. iv. 2.

And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth. These words point out in what manner the King of Zion should treat his obstinate enemies, and form the counterpart to his gracious regards for his people. The prophet divides his subject into two parts, the latter serving to explain and illustrate the former. The Prince of life, and King of glory, to whom this prediction relates, having received a kingdom, was to rule all nations, to subdue all opposition, to vanquish all his adversaries, and to provide for the defence and safety of his subjects. By the earth that he shall smite, is not meant the terrestrial globe upon which we live, which God hath given to the children of men for a habitation, but its inhabitants, who have it for a place of residence. In this sense the earth is sometimes mentioned in scripture, as in Gen. xi. 1. where we read, ‘That the whole earth was of one language, and one speech.’ The word, however, must here be understood in a limited sense; for among the inhabitants of the earth, there are not only the incorrigible enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, but likewise his faithful friends, whom he will not smite in the sense now intended. The expression, therefore, must be interpreted as having a more restricted meaning, in which, on some occasions, it is used by the sacred writers, to denote the land of Canaan, or the whole Roman empire. In this sense, the evangelist Luke affirms, that, at the time of our Saviour’s crucifixion, ‘there was darkness over all the earth*.’ The earth then may here signify earthly men, who are of this earth; who have their portion in this life, and mind earthly things; whose god is their belly, whose glory is their shame, and whose end is destruction.—These enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ our prophet declares, that he will smite. The expression intimates, as in some other passages of the sacred writings, that he would exert

* Luke xxiii. 44.

his mighty power in executing righteous vengeance upon those who act in opposition to his kingdom and glory. He would afflict them with direful calamities, strike them through in the day of his wrath, and deliver them over to death, accompanied with all its terrors.—This he would do *with the rod of his mouth*; or by the word of his mouth, wherewith the prophet Hosea affirms, that he hewed the perverse and disobedient of his people. The word of God is very properly called the rod of his mouth, as it proceeds from him, and serves not only, like a rod, to support those who use it aright, but to wound those who persist in their opposition to our Lord, and his Christ. By this rod, Pharaoh and the Egyptians were smitten, and afterward the Assyrian army; and by the same rod, the land of Judea was to be smitten, because the citizens thereof would not submit to the government of the Messiah, but hated him, rejected his gospel, and resisted his Spirit. And afterward the Roman empire, which acted in hostility to the interests and subjects of Jesus Christ, was smitten and overthrown; exhibiting, in its destruction, an instructive representation of the perdition of all the wicked of the earth.

And with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. The Hebrew word used to describe this character, denotes, that they are unquiet themselves, and that it is their employment to trouble and disturb others. The wicked do not sin merely through precipitation and inadvertence, but with deliberation and fixed purpose: to them transgression is not odious and painful, but agreeable and pleasant. They perform not acts of impiety and injustice occasionally, through some present powerful temptation; but their time, their strength and spirits, are consumed in committing iniquity; whilst, with great diligence, and no little skill, they persist in their pernicious practices. Having laid aside subjection to the law of God, and regard to justice and honesty, and divested themselves

of respect for things sacred, they are governed by their corrupt inclinations, and perpetrate with avidity what they ought to avoid with the utmost solicitude. The persons intended, are lawless, enormous transgressors, who, having thrown off all regard to piety, equity, and good conscience, employ themselves in working with greediness all manner of iniquity.—People of this character, Jesus Christ shall slay with the breath of his lips. In the language of scripture, slaying denotes not only a violent painful death, which is the proper meaning of the word, but likewise the troubles and calamities to which men are exposed, though they terminate not immediately in their dissolution. In this sense the expression is used by the church, where she thus addresseth God: ‘For thy sake we are killed (or slain) all the day long*.’ Both senses may be included in this prediction. In the exercise of his regal power, the great Messiah shall deprive the wicked of the comforts they enjoy, and inflict upon them those severe calamities which shall issue in death and destruction.—This he will do

With the breath of his lips. These words may intimate the way and manner in which this prophecy shall be accomplished. It shall be fulfilled by means of his word and command; or by the ministry of the gospel, which proceeds from his mouth, and gives a fatal blow to those who are of the above description. Or the expression may denote, the ease and facility with which Jesus Christ shall slay the wicked. As he revives and comforts the hearts of his people with the light of his countenance, so he overthrows the wicked by the breath of his lips. Life and death are entirely at the command of Jesus Christ: by his breath he quickens those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and by his breath he slays the wicked.—This prediction was remarkably verified, when the officers came with swords and staves to apprehend our blessed

* Psal. xlv. 25.

Saviour. Having inquired of them, ‘ Whom seek ye? They answered, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. As soon as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.’ If these few simple words had such power accompanying them, as to lay the officers upon the ground, how can the wicked resist his sharp rebukes, and the awful denunciations of his wrath? It shall be farther fulfilled, when that wicked one shall be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming; when the man of sin, the son of perdition, shall be destroyed, and the throne of iniquity subverted. And at the final judgment, the Son of God, by the breath of his lips, by the decisive sentence he will pronounce upon the wicked, shall fully accomplish what is here written. ‘ He shall rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup*.’ Such shall be the complete triumph of Messiah over the wicked, until wickedness be utterly demolished, and righteousness established for ever in his kingdom.— Let us reverence this glorious Person, and stand in awe of the judgments of his mouth. This is the proper improvement which the scripture teaches us to make of the subject we have now been considering. When God should destroy and take away the wicked man, who boasted in mischief, whose character is described in the fifty-second psalm, it is declared, that ‘ the righteous shall see and fear’ the power and glory of Jehovah, displayed in rooting him out of the land of the living. May what we have now heard fill our minds with reverence of him who will smite and slay all the wicked of the earth!

5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

* Psal. xi. 6.

In this verse, are represented the amiable personal endowments of Messiah the Prince, which were to be conspicuous in the administration of his government, and from the exercise of which it should acquire glory and stability.—I apprehend that the righteousness here intended, is not the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of which the apostle Peter speaks *, which the apostle Paul calls the obedience of Christ †, comprehending all the actions that the Son of God performed in compliance with the command and will of his Father, and all the sufferings to which he submitted for our redemption. This righteousness the scripture saith, is unto all, and upon all them that believe; and the cordial acceptance of this gift, as it is called, is always accompanied with the remission of sins, and a right to everlasting life. I do not see how this righteousness can with propriety be called the girdle of our Lord's loins; and, therefore, the righteousness of which our prophet speaks, seems to be that personal excellency whereby this illustrious Person should govern the whole world, and particularly the subjects of his spiritual kingdom, with the utmost impartiality, according to the most equitable laws, distributing rewards and punishments to every one according to his real desert. He is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works. All his laws, like himself, are holy, just, and good. Possessed of consummate rectitude, which shines with the brightest lustre in all his dispensations, with the strictest equity he confers the richest rewards on his faithful servants, and never punishes except on the clearest evidence, always proportioning the reward to the service, and the punishment to the transgression. ‘Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity: therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows ‡.’—

* 2 Peter i. 1.

† Rom. v. 19.

‡ Psal. xlv. 7.

Faithfulness, or truth, as the Hebrew word signifies, may denote the exact correspondence that subsists between the declarations he hath published, and the objects which they are intended to represent, conjoined with his inviolable regard to the seasonable fulfilment of the promises he hath given for the benefit of his church. His knowledge being perfect and unlimited, he is intimately acquainted with every object that he reveals to men: he always remembers what he hath spoken: and his faithfulness being unchangeable, he never alters his mind; he invariably adheres to his declarations, and never faileth to perform whatever he hath promised. ‘Ye know
 ‘ in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not
 ‘ one thing hath failed of all the good things which
 ‘ the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are
 ‘ come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath
 ‘ failed thereof*. All the promises of God in him
 ‘ are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God
 ‘ by us †.’ Hence the doctrine of the gospel, which contains the testimony and promises of Jesus Christ, is called, by the apostle Paul, ‘The truth of Christ †.’ Faithful and true are all his sayings, who came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil; and who hath solemnly affirmed, that till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled †. Faithful are all his promises, who himself is the truth, and was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. Perfect righteousness, and everlasting faithfulness, are happily united in his character, and shine forth with resplendent splendour through every part of his regal administration:—they are foretold to be

The girdle of his loins, and the girdle of his reins.
 Girdles of various kinds, made of valuable materials,

* Joshua xxiii. 14.

† 2 Cor. i. 20.

‡ Eph. iv. 21.

|| Matth. v. 17, 18.

were anciently worn by persons of high rank, which distinguished them from those of inferior station, by whom girdles of some sort were likewise worn. The girdles which the priests put on, were made of gold, of blue, of purple, scarlet, and fine-twined linen. The military girdle was sometimes of considerable excellence and value, as is plainly intimated in what Joab said to the young man, who informed him he had seen Absalom hanging in a tree: ‘Why didst thou not there smite him to the ground, and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver and a girdle*.’ Righteousness and faithfulness, agreeably blended together, compose the girdle of the Messiah. These two amiable qualities cannot be separated, and serve mutually to illustrate each other: faithfulness is necessary to fulfil the promises of God; and righteousness is no less requisite to discern the characters of those to whom they ought to be fulfilled, in what measure, and in what time they should be accomplished. His praises, therefore, are often celebrated in scripture, on account of the intimate union and harmonious exercise of these amiable excellencies, many instances of which occur in the book of Psalms. With these valuable qualifications, the loins of the Messiah’s mind, and the reins of his heart, the seat of his affections and most secret operations, were to be encompassed, strengthened, and adorned. The figure here employed, plainly signifies, that righteousness and faithfulness are virtues of which the Messiah should be really possessed, and which should always closely adhere to him, like a girdle, in the whole of his conduct, and particularly in the exercise of his regal office.—That as a girdle surrounds a man’s whole body, and is seen to advantage whithersoever he turn himself, so, in like manner, these two divine excellencies should every way appear most conspicuous in the Messiah’s administration of the affairs of his king-

* 2 Sam. xviii. 14.

dom.—That as the girdles, which were anciently worn, served to fasten the loose and flowing garments that were then used, and to strengthen the loins of those who were girt with them, so these glorious perfections complete the character of the King of Israel, and give vigour to the honourable and successful exercise of regal authority.—That as girdles served in ancient times for ornaments to the illustrious persons who put them on, so righteousness and faithfulness were eminently to adorn the personal conduct and public character of the Prince of peace, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hence the apostle John declares, that when he saw heaven opened, ‘ he beheld him ‘ who was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war*.’——Gird up then the loins of your minds, brethren, with the girdle of righteousness and faithfulness. Be sure that these necessary graces be united in your temper and conduct. In vain you pretend to be righteous, if you are not faithful; and no less vain will be your pretensions to faithfulness, if you are unrighteous. If you are Christians indeed, you will be faithful in Christ Jesus to the important trust he hath reposed in you, and the solemn engagements you have come under to his service; and you will study a growing resemblance to him, to whom you are predestinated to be conformed. In the words of Jesus Christ, ‘ Let your loins be girded ‘ about, and your lights burning. And ye yourselves ‘ like unto men that wait for their Lord †’.

6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

7 And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

* Rev. xix. 11.

† Luke xii. 35, 36.

8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice-den.

In these verses, our prophet foretels the flourishing state of the Messiah's kingdom, in which tranquillity, security, and happiness, should universally prevail.—Having represented the glory and felicity of the Messiah's reign, his equity and fidelity in the exercise of his government, that illustrious Person is here introduced in the character of a great Shepherd; and his people as a large flock, composed of divers tribes, of different dispositions and conditions, feeding and reposing themselves under his pastoral care, in the enjoyment of the most agreeable harmony and concord. This prediction, like many others, is expressed in terms that are highly figurative and allegorical, after the eastern manner, adopted by the writers of the Old Testament when treating of spiritual subjects. This method of instruction was peculiarly suited to the genius and condition of the people to whom the prophets delivered the messages with which they were intrusted, and is admirably adapted to convey just apprehensions of the sublime truths which they delivered. Though this style may appear dark and fanciful to some, and however mysterious writings of this sort may seem in our apprehensions, this mode of expression was well known, commonly practised, and much revered by the wisest men of ancient times; and hath very properly been employed, by the inspired writers, to communicate the most important revelations that they received for the benefit of mankind. Every one knows that gold, silver, and precious stones; that health, strength, and long life; that riches, liberty, and dominion, with things of a similar nature, are much esteemed, and earnestly pursued by the bulk of men. What then can more impress their minds with a just sense of the inestimable value of spiritual and invisible objects,

and

and animate to pursue them with greater avidity, than to represent them by those things, the excellency of which is universally acknowledged, and the enjoyment of which is sought after with the greatest ardour. Most people, especially in rural life, are well acquainted with the nature and qualities of the various species of animals that are around them; and concerning others, they receive information in different ways. By an easy and natural transition, founded upon the resemblance between the tempers for which these creatures are most remarkable, and those most conspicuous in men, the names of the former are often given to the latter. Many instances of this sort occur in scripture, as in Ezek. xxxiv. 31. where God, speaking parabolically, thus addresseth his people: ‘Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God.’ In the instructions which our Lord gave to his disciples, when he sent them forth to preach the gospel, he told them, ‘Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*.’ And in the verses now before us, two opposite characters among mankind, of very different dispositions and practices, who form the subject of this prediction, are represented by two classes of animals; one of which is remarkable for gentleness and mildness, and the other for ferocity and cruelty.—To the first class belong,

The lamb, the kid, the calf, the fatling, the cow, and the ox. The lamb and the kid may figuratively represent those who are babes in Christ; whom the apostle Peter calls, ‘new-born babes †;’ and whom the apostle John describes, as ‘his little children ‡;’ who as yet have made small progress in the divine life, and have not attained to spiritual strength and firmness.—The calf may be viewed as an emblem of those young men in the flock of Jesus Christ, who,

* Matth. x. 16.

† 1 Peter ii. 2.

‡ 1 John ii. 13.

in the words of the prophet, grow up as calves in the stall, making rapid progress in spiritual stature, and increasing in strength and vigour.—The fatling, that hath been highly fed, and well taken care of, may signify those in the church of God who, by means of the word of righteousness, and his tender care who feeds his flock like a shepherd, have grown up in knowledge and grace; and, being thoroughly furnished for every good work, have become highly useful and ornamental to the people of God.—The cow may be considered as symbolical of those who, having made great progress in the knowledge of divine truth, and the practice of piety and all good works, are happily qualified to assist others, and in many respects are fitted to promote their real benefit.—The ox may be intended as an instructive figure of those respectable and laborious servants of God, who are steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; who are diligent and patient in continuance in well-doing. Such seem to be the persons who are intended by the several animals which are here mentioned.

Beside the particular resemblances which justify the figurative language here used, there are also some general properties which belong in common to all the creatures in this class. The great Creator hath endowed them with mildness and gentleness of temper, in opposition to the fierceness and rapacity of the other class. In this respect, they significantly represent the meekness, humility, benignity, and the other fruits of the Spirit, which are in all them that believe. Their extensive usefulness, in supplying mankind both with sustenance and clothing, and in several respects rendering society agreeable and comfortable, exhibits a lively representation of the disciples of Jesus Christ, who in love serve one another, by performing the mutual good offices to which they are obliged by the law of Christ, and thus promote each other's temporal and spiritual benefit. The creatures of which I

now

now speak, were reckoned among those which were pronounced clean under the former dispensation, when there subsisted a difference between clean and unclean animals; between those which might be eaten, and offered in sacrifice to God, and those which were prohibited to be used for food, or presented to the Lord. This circumstance points out the spiritual condition of the faithful in Christ Jesus, whose hearts are purified by faith; who are washed, justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. The animals whose names are here mentioned, are reared by their proprietors at a considerable expence; or being purchased by them, constitute part of their riches. In this respect also, they are figurative of the peculiar people of Jesus Christ, who are nourished and brought up by him, and are bought with a price, not of corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with his own precious blood. Once more: Being unfit for war, and incapable of defending themselves from the hostile attacks of wild rapacious creatures, who would seize upon them for a prey, they represent the church of Jesus Christ, constituted of those who are harmless and without offence, and often exposed to the rapacity of their fierce and malignant persecutors.

The wolf, the leopard, the young lion, the bear, and the lion, are the creatures here named, belonging to the other class, of which I am now to speak.—The wolf, which is an exceeding fierce and cunning animal, is a name which the apostle Paul gives to false teachers; against whom our Lord thus admonisheth his disciples: ‘Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheeps clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*’; inimical to the flock, and possessed of an insatiable desire of tearing them to pieces.—The leopard is remarkable for his spotted skin, for his ferocity and greediness of prey, which he

* Matth. vii. 15.

is said to catch with much art and slyness, hiding himself among the branches of trees, that from thence he may suddenly spring out and lay hold upon it. He, therefore, affords a striking emblem of those who, assuming the appearance of regard to religion, conceal their real designs; who, whilst they profess much, discover evident marks of hypocrisy, still retaining the most barbarous cruelty of disposition against the harmless followers of Jesus Christ.—The bear is a very strong and fierce animal, which is ready to seize upon, and destroy any tame beasts that come within its reach; and so emphatically represents those inhuman powerful enemies of the church, who rage with violence against her, and endeavour to tear in pieces those of whom she is composed.—The lion, and young lion, which are reckoned chief among the beasts, are remarkable for their strength and boldness; and, therefore, are proper emblems of the powerful enemies of the church, who are often spoken of in scripture by this name. Like lions, they are terrible in their approach: they are greedy of prey, vigilant, bloody, and ravenous.—Such are the persons who seem intended by this latter class of wild animals; who are emblematical of the enemies of the kingdom of Christ, to whom, in several respects, they bear a striking resemblance.

Beside these particular instances of likeness at which I have now hinted, there are some general properties which are common to all the creatures of this last description, wherein they bear a remarkable similitude to those whom they here represent. Ferocity and savage cruelty is their leading characteristic, in opposition to the mildness and gentleness of the other class; and, in this respect, they exhibit a just picture of the rapacious and barbarous enemies of the meek disciples of Jesus Christ, and of those who are at enmity with his law, having never been subdued unto his love and obedience. Implacable hatred, and a strong aversion to mankind, with a natural desire to injure and destroy them,

them, form another line of resemblance between the creatures here mentioned, and those signified by them, who are filled with malice and envy, and are possessed of inclination and ability to injure and annoy the people of God. Once more: The animals of this class were reckoned among the unclean beasts, which, under the Mosaic œconomy, were forbidden to be used by the children of Israel. In this view, they afford a lively representation of the character and condition of the enemies of the Messiah's kingdom, who are often spoken of in scripture in such language as plainly intimates their great impurity and corruption. They are exhibited under a variety of emblems, which serve to shew their extreme pollution; which renders them improper objects for the church of God to be conversant with, or to form intimate connection with them.

To perceive the true meaning and scope of this prophecy, let us turn our attention to the intimate intercourse, and harmonious agreement, which is here foretold should subsist among those who are thus figuratively described. This desirable concord cannot be otherwise enjoyed than by a thorough change having been made, by means of the word and gospel of God, on the last-mentioned class of people, who, by faith in Jesus Christ, the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit, the fear and love of God, are divested of their natural ferocity, and rendered mild and peaceable in their temper and conduct, so as no longer to act in hostility against the servants of God.—The first expression employed to denote the tranquillity and harmony of the very different characters of mankind, of whom the prophet speaks, is, *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb.* The word intimates, familiar domestic intercourse, such as subsists among those who belong to the same house and family. Divested, by divine grace, of their malignant dispositions, and the powerful inclination by which they were once led to injure the flock of Christ, they are admitted to enjoy
friendly

friendly correspondence with the young and feeble in the household of God; and, becoming fellow-citizens with the saints, they shall feed with them upon the same spiritual provision, and drink from the same wells of salvation.—The next expression used by our prophet, is, *The leopard shall lie down with the kid.* Those who were the most virulent and cruel enemies of the church, and most inimical to their safety, shall repose themselves with the least of their brethren in the kingdom of God, in those green pastures, and quiet resting-places, where they shall enjoy the most agreeable tranquillity, with abundance of spiritual blessings, communicated by the great Shepherd of Israel.—It is farther foretold, *And the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together.* Those who are growing up toward the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, being plentifully fed with spiritual provision suited to their tender years, shall form habits of friendship and intimacy with those whom they were taught, by the precept and example of their fathers, to consider as a prey which they ought to annoy and devour.—*And a little child shall lead them.* However various the natural dispositions of those who are here described, they should all unite in subjecting themselves to the good conduct of ministers of the gospel, who, on account of the humility and simplicity of their minds, and the inoffensiveness of their behaviour, may be intended by the figurative description of a little child. Their employment, like that of little children, consists in leading the flock to proper pasturage, and in gently taking care of them: out of the mouth of these little children, God perfecteth praise; and with respect to such, our Lord gives this necessary caution, ‘Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones*.’—*And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together.* Persons of every age, remarkable for their natural ferocity and barbarity, being converted to the faith and obedience of the

* Matth. xviii. 10.

Son of God, shall be admitted to feed with the church, in the green pastures of the word and ordinances, wherein they shall enjoy intimate pleasing intercourse with the disciples of Jesus Christ, and the most agreeable tranquillity and repose.—*And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* This prediction may especially seem surprising, that a wild voracious animal, which commonly lives upon flesh, should act so contrary to his nature and practice, as to feed upon straw, the food of tame and useful creatures, as the cow. Such, however, is the astonishing change here foretold, that those who were fierce, savage, and powerful as the lion, rejecting the provision which they formerly made, to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, should live upon the simple doctrines of the gospel, whereby the flock of Jesus Christ is nourished and supported, as most agreeable to them, though not suited to gratify corrupt human nature.

And the sucking child shall play upon the hole of the asp, &c. This article of the prediction seems still more wonderful than any thing above mentioned. The asp and the cockatrice are a kind of poisonous serpents, whose bite or sting are extremely dangerous and deadly. They are said to be so venomous as to infect the air to such a degree that no creature can live near them: their poison is reported to be so strong that there is no cure for it; and they have been known to kill not only by the touch, but by their hissing. These creatures afford a significant representation of wicked men, whose poison is affirmed to be like the poison of a serpent*; and ‘under whose lips (the apostle of the Gentiles asserts) is the poison of asps †.’ Persons of this description, by disseminating their dangerous tenets, overturn the faith of some; and, by reproaches and censures, for which they are well furnished, they give deadly wounds to those with whom they are conversant. The hole of the asp, and the cockatrice-den, are the places

* Psal. lviii. 4.

† Rom. iii. 13.

where these creatures commonly resort, and in which they take up their residence. In a figurative sense, they may denote the schools and seminaries in which the inveterate adversaries of the gospel and disciples of Jesus Christ propagated the vain philosophy, and foolish superstition, that are highly dangerous to the sacred interests of the church of God; and in which they threw out their venomous aspersions upon the salutary doctrines of the Son of God, and attacked with their malicious calumnies the devout worshippers of God our Saviour. Nigh to places of this sort, which were once the haunts of a generation of vipers, where no body durst approach without imminent danger, even young converts to Jesus Christ, who were but lately admitted into his church, should be often employed, without receiving any material injury. The least and weakest of the children of God shall be preserved in safety amid the assaults of their implacable enemies, or their adversaries shall be divested of their poisonous nature; in consequence of which, they shall enjoy with one another the most agreeable intercourse, and friendly correspondence.—Such seems to be the import of the figurative predictions which we have now been considering. Such are the astonishing blessed effects of the gospel of peace, when firmly believed, and cordially embraced. Accompanied with divine power, it divests men of their fierce and savage dispositions; it renders them mild and gentle; it converts their natural hatred to each other into tender affection, expressed by mutual good offices. Former animosities and quarrels are happily laid aside: harmony and good agreement are substituted in their room: they live in peace, and the God of love and peace is ever with them. How highly then ought we to value, and how diligently to improve the glorious gospel with which we are favoured, solicitous that it may produce, in our hearts and lives, these blessed effects with which it is here foretold it shall be accompanied!

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Exemption from every hurtful annoyance, and a plenitude of divine knowledge, is foretold to be enjoyed by the church of God at the time to which this prophecy refers.—The violent and cruel enemies of the disciples of Jesus Christ, intended by the rapacious animals mentioned in the foregoing predictions, are doubtless the persons concerning whom it is here affirmed, they shall not hurt nor destroy. The hearts of those who were formerly inclined to disturb and harass good men shall be happily changed, so that they shall never more molest and injure them, whose interests they shall henceforth consider as sacred and inviolable. The glorious privilege which is the subject of this prediction, shall not be confined to one particular place, but shall extend to all God's holy mountain; which in this, as in other prophecies, denotes the church of God, whereof the holy hill of Zion was anciently an eminent type. However widely extended, it shall be advanced to a state of desirable tranquillity, under the watchful care of faithful pastors, and the kind protection of pious princes. The expression before us, contains in it much more than at first sight it seems to comprehend, like many others that are expressed in a negative form; and is designed to assure the servants of Jesus Christ, that they shall be delivered from external violence, and internal discords, and have the comfortable enjoyment of all spiritual good things. Happy the people who are in such a case as this! which is excellently described by Eliphaz the Temanite, in the following animated address to his friend Job: ' God shall deliver thee in
' six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch
' thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death;

‘ and in war, from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh.—Thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace *;’ &c.

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. The earth may here denote, as in some other passages of scripture, its inhabitants, who are endowed with reason, and capable of being filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The kingdom of Jesus Christ was not to remain confined to the land of Judea under the New-Testament dispensation, but to be extended to all nations, kindreds, and languages. Those who inhabit the various countries wherein the gospel was to be preached, shall be filled, according to this prophecy, with the knowledge of the Lord. In the language of the sacred oracles, the earth is said to be full of any thing which hath become exceeding common and prevalent among its inhabitants. In this sense it is affirmed, ‘The earth was corrupt before God; and the earth was filled with violence †;’ and in the verse under consideration, it is foretold to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The expression strongly intimates, the vast abundance of this inestimable treasure, with which men should every where be enriched and satisfied.—The knowledge intended, is not that which is merely speculative, derived from the contemplation of the works of God, of which many in the Heathen world were possessed. Such knowledge is indeed necessary to attain the acquaintance with God here spoken of; and though it float only in the head, and descend not to the heart, so as to produce good fruits, it is nevertheless highly useful in many respects to the world. The knowledge of which our prophet speaks, is far more excellent, and attended with the most salutary effects.

* Job v. 19. *et seq.*

† Gen. vi. 11.

It supposes an external revelation of God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, making known to men the way of salvation, and accompanied with the internal revelation of the Spirit of wisdom, illuminating the mind with the knowledge of him, and effectually disposing the heart to believe and obey the gospel. It is a practical knowledge, which forms into a resemblance of the object on which it terminates; and produces faith in the perfections, providence, and testimony of God, reverence of his majesty and grandeur, love to his glory and salvation, trust in his goodness and faithfulness, and submission to his righteous laws and dispensations. Such, I apprehend, is the knowledge of the Lord, with which the prophet foretels the earth shall be filled.—The prediction is illustrated by a beautiful similitude,

As the waters cover the sea. By the sea, is meant the channel of the sea, the great reservoir wherein the waters of the ocean are contained. The comparison plainly shews, the vast abundance, the extensive spread, the great depth, and the mighty influence of the knowledge of the Lord, in those places of the earth wherein the kingdom of the Messiah should be erected. It also intimates, that the people inhabiting those places of the earth where this divine knowledge should reach, were, by the mighty power of God, to be disposed to hold this sacred treasure of profound and copious knowledge, and to be so occupied with it that few or none were to remain exempted. With such irresistible force should it extend over the inhabited world, that it would be as difficult to interrupt or hinder its progress, as to prevent the sea from covering the sands destined to contain it. Such should be the prevalence of the doctrine of Jesus Christ in the world, unaided by human favour or power, in opposition to the ignorance, vices, and prejudices of mankind, the arts and efforts of kingdoms and empires to hinder its progress and success, as fully to verify this prophecy, and to justify the comparison.

comparison here stated.—This event is mentioned as the effect of that spiritual concord foretold in the preceding verses; and in this light it ought to be considered. Ignorance of God is the source of error, and every species of iniquity: whereas a profound and extensive knowledge of God, and his ways, is the happy mean of promoting holiness and peace among people of all descriptions: it heartily reconciles them to each other; it removes every separate interest; it harmonizes their purposes and aims; it transforms them in some measure into the image of God; it excites good affections, and prompts to a corresponding practice.—Follow on then to know the Lord, and to advance the knowledge of God among your brethren. For this purpose, diligently improve all the opportunities you enjoy, of receiving fresh additions, from every quarter, to your knowledge of God, that, like a river, which is continually augmented by the streams flowing into it, your acquaintance with him may be gradually enlarged, until you are thereby filled, enriched, and satisfied. Shall we labour to become acquainted with the creatures, and remain indifferent to the knowledge of the Lord, of whose goodness we largely participate, whose mercies we are continually receiving, and who is infinitely the most glorious and amiable of all the objects that can occupy our minds? He is light without darkness, truth without dissimulation, love without the least unkindness, good without any evil, pure without the smallest spot, and the Author of all that goodness and beauty that is diffused throughout creation. Such is his tender compassion toward the children of men, that he sent his only begotten Son from his throne of majesty to this earth, that he might assume our nature, submit to our infirmities, display his amiable grace, and bear our sins on his own body on the tree. Shall we not then endeavour to know him, by whose death we live, by whose blood we are cleansed, and in virtue of whose humiliation we are exalted? Shall

we not rejoice in the delightful prospect with which this prophecy presents us, that the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea?

The above predictions received a partial accomplishment, in different periods, in the kingdom which Jesus Christ hath founded upon this earth. Under the ministry of his apostles, his church resembled a flock of those tame and useful animals which are mentioned in the preceding verses, inspected by the shepherds with whom he intrusted them, exposed nevertheless to the powerful assaults of their inveterate cruel enemies. By means of the everlasting gospel, accompanied with the most astonishing miracles, and the invisible agency of the Holy Spirit, many of the implacable fierce adversaries of the church of Christ were vanquished; they subjected themselves to the sceptre of the Son of God, laid aside their former ferocity and enmity against the followers of the Lamb, and joined themselves to the assemblies of the saints, with whom they enjoyed intimate spiritual intercourse, and received spiritual nourishment. Many illustrious instances might be mentioned; such as Saul, afterward called Paul; Sergius, the deputy of Cyprus; Dionysius, the Areopagite; with many other respectable persons in Asia, Greece, and Rome, among whom were several members of Cæsar's household. Public schools and seminaries of learning, which had been the haunts of abominable idolatry and superstition, were converted into places of divine worship; and, occupied by those who are now called the Fathers of the church, they were frequented without the least fear of danger by the harmless children of God.—These predictions were farther fulfilled in the time of Constantine, when the Roman empire emerged from the darkness of Heathenism, and embraced the divine light of the gospel; when the disciples of Christ were delivered from the oppression and persecution of their enemies, and there was
none

none to hurt and to destroy in all God's holy mountain. At the memorable æra of the Reformation from Popery and arbitrary power, they doubtless received a still larger accomplishment, by the vast increase and extensive spread of divine knowledge.—For their full completion, we look forward to the happy period which shall follow the destruction of Antichrist, wherein the church of God, composed of Jews and Gentiles, under the tuition of faithful pastors, and the protection of good government, shall enjoy agreeable tranquillity, and large measures of divine knowledge, holiness, and consolation. In the joyful expectation of this most desirable event, let us exert ourselves to the utmost, that the approach of this happy period be not retarded through our fault; and that the church of Christ may attain the accomplishment of their hopes, and the answer of their prayers.

10 ¶ And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious.

In this and the following verses of this chapter, the prophet foretels the remarkable fortunes of the Messiah's kingdom, with their immediate consequences; such as the conversion of the Gentiles, the vocation of the dispersed Jews, with the diminution of the adverse powers of Egypt and Assyria, to make way for the great work of divine grace and mercy.—In this verse, the conversion of the Gentiles is foretold. The time fixed for this purpose, here referred to, is the remarkable period in which the great events foretold in the preceding context shall receive their accomplishment. By the root of Jesse, is no doubt meant the illustrious Person whom the prophet intended in the first verse of this chapter, where he is described, as 'a rod which should come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and the branch that should grow out

‘out of his roots.’ This is no other than the Messiah, the Lord and Son of David, who expressly affirms concerning himself, in the book of Revelation, ‘I am ‘the root and offspring of David*.’ Viewing Jesus Christ our Lord in his human nature, we know he was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and consequently was the Son of David, who sprang from the root of Jesse. Contemplating him in his divine nature, he is David’s Lord; the root from which Jesse, and all the creatures, derive their existence, and by whom they are supported in being. This is the great mystery of godliness, which the Jews did not understand when it was proposed to them by our Lord himself. This description, like many others given of the Messiah, plainly supposes his real divinity, and the infinite merit of his perfect obedience, which are almost every where expressed or supposed in the prophecies delivered concerning him. Like a root that groweth out of dry ground, he had no form or comeliness: his appearance to human view was mean and contemptible: men did not perceive the dignity of his person, the excellence of his character, nor the design of his coming into this world. From this root arise all those trees of righteousness that are planted in the house of the Lord, that flourish in the courts of our God; and from thence they derive their life, nourishment, and fruitfulness.

Which shall stand for an ensign of the people. This expression seems to have an obvious reference to the ancient practice of princes or commanders, who, in times of imminent danger, ordered standards or banners to be erected upon the tops of hills and rising grounds, that the inhabitants of the country, and especially the military, might be assembled with the utmost expedition, to receive the instructions of their prince or general, and to perform the service in

* Rev. xxii. 16.

which he thought proper to employ them. By attending to the words under consideration, you will observe, that the Messiah is compared not to the sovereign, who requires the standard to be set up, but to the ensign or banner itself, which, by his authority, is appointed to be elevated. Like an ensign placed upon an eminence, Jesus Christ, the root of Jesse, should be publicly exhibited in the preaching of the gospel, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, that he may gather together all the children of the Most High, who are scattered abroad, to the only means of salvation. Beside him there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby they can be saved: he is the alone infallible Teacher, who can instruct them so as to make wise unto salvation: he is the only High-priest, through whose obedience and sufferings they can obtain remission of sins: he is the only King, under whose government they can enjoy safety, prosperity, and felicity. Like a standard elevated on the top of a mountain, Jesus Christ is seen by vast multitudes, who look to him as the Israelites, stung by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, looked to the brazen serpent, that they might be healed. They look on him whom they have pierced by their sins, as the only appointed means of deliverance; and, in obedience to his call, they look unto him from all the ends of the earth, that they may be saved. Like a banner erected on the summit of a hill, Jesus Christ is exalted very high in the ministry of the gospel, as possessed of unrivalled excellence and glory; and, having accomplished the great ends of his humiliation, and obedience unto death, he is made higher than the heavens, and set down at the right hand of the throne of God. To him, as to a standard placed on the top of a mountain, multitudes shall resort from all quarters, as to the centre of union, that they may enjoy intimate fellowship with him, and with one another. To him shall men come, as foretold by our prophet; to him shall be the gathering of the people; to him shall

shall they flee, as doves to their windows; that they may enjoy his protection, that they may enter into his service, that they may receive direction from him in their various movements, that they may fight under his banner, and be conducted by him to everlasting victory and triumph. For these important purposes, the Messiah shall stand, as here foretold, firmly established upon an immovable foundation, by divine power and love, supported by irrefragable evidence, and invincible proofs of his grace and ability to save to the uttermost.

To it shall the Gentiles seek, &c. The Gentiles, who are here intended, are those nations of the earth which had been immersed in profound ignorance, and abominable superstition; living without God and without Christ in the world, walking in the vanity of their minds, alienated from the life of God; and, past feeling, had given themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness*. People of this description, having heard of a certain illustrious Teacher arising from the root of Jesse, who was appointed to give unto men the knowledge of salvation, to be the refuge of sinners, and the Redeemer of the miserable, leaving their false oracles and delusive practices, should have recourse to this Instructor of the foolish, and Saviour of the lost. To him they should seek, not from vain curiosity and sinister views, but from good intention; not with hypocrisy and dissimulation, but with their whole hearts; not with indifference and negligence, but with earnestness and diligence. To him they should resort, as to a strong-hold, for protection from danger; as to a Saviour, for deliverance from evil; as to a mighty One, for help in time of need; as to a wise Counsellor, for advice and direction in every emergency.—The apostle Paul, citing this passage

* Eph. iv. 17. *et seq.*

with some little variation, in his Epistle to the Romans, thus speaks of this root of Jesse: ‘ He shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, and in him shall the Gentiles trust *.’ There is an intimate connection between seeking and trusting in the Messiah. Men will not seek to him in whom they cannot trust, nor will they trust in him whom they do not seek and hope to enjoy. The apostle thus interprets the words of our prophet, and fairly represents the affectionate regard which the Gentiles should testify for Jesus Christ, to whom they should seek, and in whom they ought to trust for life and salvation.—May these words be this day fulfilled in you, my brethren! A greater than Solomon is here; to whom people of all nations resorted, to hear his wisdom, and to contemplate the excellent majesty to which God had advanced him. Come then to Jesus Christ, to consult him about all your doubts and perplexities, convinced, that in him dwells all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that in him are wonderfully conjoined the glory of the Son of God with the grace of the Son of man. A greater is here than the high-priest of Israel, who was arrayed with garments for glory and beauty. Seek to the great High-priest appointed over the house of God, on whom rests the Spirit of glory, that, through his atonement and intercession, you may be pardoned, sanctified, and saved.

And his rest shall be glorious. If you inquire, in the words of God, by our prophet, ‘ Where is the place of my rest †?’ I answer with the royal prophet, ‘ The Lord hath chosen Zion: he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it ‡.’ In Zion God anciently fixed his abode, and there continued until the iniquities of Israel provoked him to forsake his dwelling-place. Since that time he hath removed into the

* Rom. xv. 12. † Isaiah lxi. 1. ‡ Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14.
possession

possession of the Gentiles ; and his church, under the New Testament, is the place of his residence and rest, wherein he affords the most illustrious proofs of his presence, providence, and grace, in which he is sought, worshipped, and enjoyed by his people. This rest is here foretold shall be glorious ; filled with the divine glory, and beautified with the divine presence, in a far more eminent degree than the temple of God at Jerusalem under the former dispensation.—The prediction may likewise refer to that glorious rest into which the Messiah entered, when he also ceased from his works as God did from his ; in which he is perfectly free from all the labours, sufferings, and trials, to which he was exposed while on earth, and enjoys the most undisturbed tranquillity, and perfect felicity, in the presence of God, where is fulness of joys, and rivers of pleasures for evermore. This rest, as foretold, is truly glorious. The divine glory, which had been concealed under the veil of human nature, and the form of a servant, shone forth with ineffable splendour, when he was elevated to that glory which he had with the Father before the worlds were made. His human body is possessed of a glory far superior to the sun in his meridian brightness : his soul perpetually enjoys the most sublime pleasures ; and being invested with unlimited power in heaven and on earth, he employs it for his own glory, and the benefit of his church.—That we may be conformed to our glorious Redeemer, let us aspire to that blessed rest into which the people of God now enter by faith, wherein, being delivered from the condemnation to which sin hath exposed them, and the power of turbulent passions, they are restored to the enjoyment of peace with God, agreeable tranquillity of mind, and the most grateful improving exercises. This present rest will prove a certain pledge, a delightful foretaste, of the eternal rest that awaits you in heaven, where, freed from fears, temptations, sins, sorrows, and afflictions, you shall enjoy everlasting repose, and partici-

pate

pate in that felicity and glory to which your glorious Redeemer is exalted.

The predictions we have now been considering, were in part fulfilled after the exaltation of Jesus Christ into heaven, when the standard of his gospel was first erected, and he was exhibited to all nations as the Leader and Commander, the High-priest and Saviour, given to the people; in consequence whereof, multitudes, from among many kingdoms, resorted to him, and humbly subjected themselves to this renowned Prince and Saviour. In the time of Constantine, they received farther fulfilment, when a great accession was made to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, by the conversion of many nations to the faith and obedience of the gospel. At the memorable æra of the Reformation, they were more fully accomplished, by the wonderful events that happened at that remarkable period. And in the approaching glorious days of the expected spread and success of the gospel, we look forward, with hope and joy, to their full completion.

11 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time, to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

The collection of the Jews from their dispersions, to partake of the privileges of the church of God, is the subject of the prediction now before us.—The time to which the prophecy refers, is that wherein the Messiah shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips; when the kingdom of our Lord shall be blessed with profound peace, delivered from every adverse power, and the whole earth filled with the knowledge of God. The
remnant

remnant of his people, who are the subjects to whom this prediction relates, seem to be the same persons who, in the following verse, are called the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah; the select remains of that once highly favoured people, who are thus distinguished from the Gentile nations, with whom they shall yet be so incorporated as to form the church of Jesus Christ.—This remnant *the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover.* The expression plainly alludes to the wonderful deliverance which God wrought for the posterity of Israel, from the ignominious servitude in which they were detained in the land of Egypt, accomplished by the strong hand and stretched-out arm of Jehovah; and designed to be an eminent type of redemption by the Messiah, whereby the people of God were to be recovered from the service of sin and Satan, and the hands of all their enemies, that they may serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all their days. In their first deliverance, the tender compassions of God were richly displayed, by rescuing them from slavery; and the divine omnipotence of Jehovah was gloriously manifested, by the awful judgments inflicted upon their oppressors. In their second recovery, they shall be restored from spiritual thralldom to the enjoyment of eternal redemption, to the praise of the divine glory, which shall thereby be most illustriously exhibited. By the former interposition in their favour, they were happily extricated from hard bondage, conducted, through the most perilous circumstances, to the enjoyment of liberty, affluence, and all manner of worldly felicity. In the latter, the remnant of them belonging to the election of grace, reserved from among that dispersed people to be the illustrious monuments of divine mercy, shall return to the Lord their God, who will introduce them into the glorious liberty of his children, and lead them in the paths of righteousness to the inheritance of the saints in light.—Though what is here foretold might have
a direct

a direct reference to the deliverance of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, yet, as the children of Israel, or the posterity of the ten tribes, did not participate of this recovery, I suppose it hath chiefly in view, the far more glorious redemption of Israel and Judah from spiritual thralldom by the great Messiah.—The kingdoms and countries from which the dispersed posterity of Israel and Judah shall be collected and recovered, are mentioned in the following words :

From Assyria. A very ancient, extensive, and powerful empire, concerning which you heard many things in the Lectures I delivered from the preceding chapter. Historians seem to be agreed, that Nimrod, the great grandson of Noah, founded this kingdom, which is reckoned to have been the first in the world, and to have subsisted for about thirteen or fourteen hundred years with more or less extent and glory. It probably derived its name from Assur, one of the sons of Shem, who, it may be, had settled in that country, and was vanquished or expelled by Nimrod. Prior to its enlargement by conquests, it was bounded by Media, Susiana, Mesopotamia, and Armenia. It is now a province of Asia, subject to the Turks.—

And from Egypt. This very ancient kingdom hath been held in great renown for the learning of its inhabitants; and is famous, in sacred history, for having been the place wherein the patriarch Abraham and his posterity sojourned, and for the remarkable fertility of its soil, which rendered it the granary from whence Rome anciently, and afterward Constantinople, was supplied with provisions. It is situated in Africa, having Arabia Deserta and the Red sea on the east, Ethiopia on the south, Cerene and the deserts of Lybia on the west, and the Mediterranean sea on the north. Through this country runs the great river Nile, by which it is watered and enriched. From Pelusium to the cataract of the Nile hath been computed to be near one hundred and fifty miles, which is the length of the country; and its breadth is
said

said to be about one hundred miles. Like Assyria, it is now subject to the Turkish empire.—*And from Pathros.* This was the country wherein the Jews chiefly resided who went down to sojourn in the land of Egypt, in the days of Jeremiah the prophet *. It lay near to Arabia Petræa, at the extremity of the land of Egypt, not far from Ethiopia; and probably had its name from Pathrusim, one of the sons of Mizraim, mentioned Gen. x. 14.—*And from Cush.* This was the name of one of the sons of Ham, the son of Noah, whose posterity are said to have inhabited part of Arabia Deserta, which lay next to the land of Egypt, to the eastward of the Red sea, with part of what is called Arabia Petræa. By an easy and frequent transition, the name of the people who inhabit the country is given to the country itself: an instance of this sort lies now before us.—*And from Elam.* Elam was the name of one of the sons of Shem, the Son of Noah, from whom descended the people called Elamites, over whom Chedorlaomer was king in the days of the patriarch Abraham. These Elamites inhabited Persia, a famous kingdom in Asia, bounded on the north by the Caspian sea, on the east by India, on the south by the Indian ocean and Persian gulf, and on the west by Arabia Deserta. In the time of Daniel the prophet, Elam formed at least part of the Persian empire; for Shushan, where the kings of Persia had their residence, was in the province of Elam †.—*And from Shinar.* In this land, which I suppose to have been the same with Mesopotamia, was attempted the foolish wicked project of building a city and a tower whose top might reach unto heaven, which was called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth. Through a valley of this name runs the river Tigris, in its course from the mountains of Armenia toward the Persian gulf. Of this country Amraphel was king in the time of the

* See Jer. xliii. and xliv.

† Daniel viii. 2.

father of the faithful.—*And from Hamath.* This was anciently a famous city, which probably had its name from Hamath, one of the sons of Canaan, the grandson of Noah. It had once a king whose name was 'Toi*, who was one of the princes whom Solomon conquered. Afterward it fell into the hands of the Syrians; and may, in this place, denote the land of Syria, a large country in the Greater Asia, which now forms part of the Turkish empire.—*And from the islands of the sea:* by which may be intended the countries surrounded by the sea, lying to the westward of Canaan; such as the Lesser Asia, which was anciently considered as a peninsula; Europe, encompassed by the sea; and particularly the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. From these places, wherein the remnant of God's people are scattered, he will set his hand, to recover them from their dispersions, to enjoy the inestimable privileges of his church, and to subject themselves to his government whom he hath appointed King over his holy hill of Zion.—This prediction received its fulfilment, in some measure, at the promulgation of the gospel by the apostles and ministers of our Lord, by whom the posterity of Israel, dispersed over these places of the earth now mentioned, were invited to participate in the glorious prerogatives belonging to the kingdom of Christ; when those of them who were ordained to eternal life, believed, and were made partakers of the heavenly calling. The truly memorable event of which you read the history in the second chapter of the Acts, presents to view the first fruits of the second recovery of the remnant of God's people, and affords a happy prelibation of its future full accomplishment. As the learned Dr. Lowth observes, “ This part of the chapter contains a prophecy which certainly remains yet
“ to be accomplished, and shall in due time receive
“ its full completion:” for which, let us often unite

* 2 Sam. viii. 9.

our earnest prayers to him who builds up Jerufalem, and gathereth together the outcasts of Ifrael. Affured that he is faithful who hath promifed, let us live in the joyful expectation that he will do as he hath faid.

12 And he fhall fet up an enfign for the nations, and fhall affemble the outcasts of Ifrael, and gather together the difperfed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth.

The prophet next foretels in what manner the Lord will accomplifh the prediction contained in the preceding verfe, and the glorious fuccefs which fhould accompany the means to be employed for this purpofe.—The enfign or ftandard here intended, is the root of Jefe, the great Meffiah mentioned in the 10th verfe, who fhould be elevated to the view of all nations by the miniftry of the gofpel; under whose banner they are invited to inlift, that, by his conduct, and with his affiftance, they may war a good warfare. This enfign is erected for the benefit of the nations of the earth, that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, beholding this remarkable fignal, may repair, without delay, to this illuftrious Perfon, whom God hath given for a Leader and Commander to the people, that from him they may receive direction and fupport, with every needful bleffing, and at laft complete victory and eternal glory. What a noble difplay is thus given of the moft amiable benevolence, and tender compaffion, toward the children of men! Though the nations have rebelled againft their rightful Sovereign, revolted from under his mild government, and acted in hoftility againft their gracious Lord, the Governor among the nations hath fet up an enfign, to convene them to attend to overtures of peace, and publifhed proclamations of his good-will and mercy. He hath erected a ftandard, not, with hoftile intention, to affemble his armies, to deftroy thofe who have rifen in rebellion againft him: but he lifts up the banner of

the cross, that, by the displays of his everlasting love therein exhibited, he may draw all men unto him; that they may closely adhere to his interest, distinguish themselves by attachment to his person, nobly fight his battles, and enjoy his presence and protection. To this ensign resort all the nations of them that are saved.—The joyful consequences shall be, as described in the following part of the verse,

And shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth. The outcasts of Israel may denote, the posterity of the ten tribes of Israel, who are often called by the name of Ephraim, as in the following verse. The residue of that people have, for a long period of time, justly merited the description of outcasts, because God hath cast them out of his sight, and ejected them from the good land which he gave unto their fathers for a possession, as he threatened that he would do, if they persisted in their sins. They have also been cast out by other nations among whom they resided, as unworthy of participating with them in the privileges of good subjects. The dispersed of Judah, are the Jews, who have likewise, for many ages, been scattered to and fro among the kingdoms of the Gentiles; first, by means of the Babylonish captivity; afterward, by the Grecian monarchy, and the invasion of the Romans; and lastly, by the persecution raised by the enemies of Christianity against those that believed in Jesus Christ, who were obliged to flee for safety into different countries. So widely were they dispersed at the day of Pentecost, that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles declares, that devout men of that people then resorted to Jerusalem, out of every nation under heaven. On account of their obstinate blindness, and inveterate prejudices against the gospel of Jesus Christ, they still continue dispersed over the world, exposed to innumerable hardships, and almost every where neglected and despised.—This widely scattered people God graciously declares,

declares, *He will gather together from the four corners of the earth.* The word translated *corners*, signifies also *wings*, as you see it rendered in the margin of some Bibles; which, according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, denotes the most distant parts of the earth. In allusion to the wings of a bird, which are extended when she takes her flight, the remote extremities, the utmost boundaries of any thing, are called its wings or corners, as in the words before us. From the most remote parts of the earth, the Lord will gather together the remnant of his dispersed people. As, in scripture-language, scattering imports affliction and distress, so collecting into one place or society, intimates restoration from a calamitous condition, and recovery to a prosperous and happy state.—Had not this desirable great event been expressly foretold, we should have reckoned that the obstacles which lie in the way of its accomplishment were unsurmountable: but being promised in the faithful word of God, as his own glorious work, whose counsel shall stand, and for whom nothing is impossible, every obstacle disappears, and the great predicted object rises into view. Firmly persuaded of this approaching event, which God will hasten in its season, and encouraged in our expectations by the partial fulfilment which this prophecy hath already received, let us earnestly pray for its full completion, to the glory of God, and the joy of his people.

13 The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.

In this verse, are represented the happy consequences of the restoration and conversion of Israel and Judah. From the book of Judges we learn, that an invidious spirit powerfully operated among the Israelites as early as the days of Gideon and Jephthah. A variety

riety of circumstances might contribute to promote this bad disposition among that people, which discovered its pernicious influence on many occasions. The tribes of Joseph and Benjamin, which occupied the middle and best part of the land of Canaan, and who, of all their brethren, were the most flourishing, arose from the two sons of the same mother. Joshua, the son of Nun, who was the leader and commander of Israel, and who probably obtained some peculiar advantages for the tribe to which he belonged, was of the tribe of Ephraim. Saul, the son of Kith, who was the first anointed king over the whole nation, belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. David, the prince who next filled the throne, arose from the tribe of Judah. Jeroboam, an Ephrathite, was the instrument of rending ten tribes from their subjection to the royal family of the tribe of Judah, which was intermixed with a number of Benjamites; and of laying the foundation of another kingdom, called Ephraim or Israel, in distinction from that of Judah. From that time, emulation and strife arose between these two kingdoms, which afterward seldom enjoyed peace and concord, but were often engaged in bloody and destructive wars with each other. These causes contributed, with others that might be mentioned, to kindle and keep alive mutual rancour and envy between the two nations. At the time in which this prophecy shall be fulfilled, the envy of Ephraim shall depart, never more to appear. Envy is a most uneasy distemper of the mind, caught not so much by infection, as excited by the prosperity of other people. It preys not so much upon the mischiefs and miseries, as upon the successes and happiness of those who are its objects: it is not troubled at their losses, but at their affluence and advancement, though their riches does not diminish or injure its enjoyments. Happy period! when envy and vexation shall cease among brethren; when animosities, contentions, and discords, shall be extinguished among the people of
God;

God; when their former envies and jealousies being laid aside, tranquillity and harmony shall continually prevail.

Do you, my friends, whatever lies in your power to hasten the full accomplishment of this prophecy. To earnest prayer, add vigorous exertions, in curbing envy, and the other malevolent passions. Convinced that envy, with its inseparable concomitants, contaminate the spirit, and are as rottenness to the bones, ‘let not your hearts envy sinners: but be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*.’ Beware of repining at the felicity of others; but endeavour, by cultivating affection and friendship for them, to make their good your own. To have a heart disposed to praise God, for the benefits he confers upon your neighbours and acquaintances, is a happy attainment, which will enable you to participate in the blessings they receive. In this manner you may enjoy all the favours, deliverances, and comforts, bestowed upon those in whose gifts, graces, and privileges, you cordially rejoice; and have your happiness increased not only by your own mercies, but by those conferred upon them who are around you. In this manner you may hasten the completion of this prediction; which, in some measure, was fulfilled after the Babylonish captivity, according to the word of the Lord which came to the prophet Ezekiel, saying, ‘Take thee one stick, for Judah; and another, for Ephraim: and join them together into one stick, and they shall become one in thine hand.—And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the Heathen whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither

* Prov. xxiii. 17.

‘ shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all *.’ When God doth this, the ground of envy is removed. To a future period, however, the prediction still looks forward, of which we ought to entertain the pleasing prospect; when all the Israel of God being intimately united into one body, under Jesus Christ their common Head, in whom there is no distinction of Jew or Gentile, all national differences shall subside, and the most delightful unanimity and concord shall reign throughout the kingdom of God.

14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west, they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab, and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

The remaining enemies of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, shall, according to this prediction, become subservient in promoting the interests of his church. The Philistines, who were anciently the inveterate foes of Israel, inhabited the country which lay to the westward of the land of Canaan. Ephraim and Judah, having dropt their former animosities, and being united into one people, should, with the assistance of the Philistines, flee speedily toward the west, where their influence was to extend with great rapidity. The expression used by the prophet, intimates, that, in the execution of their benevolent design, of enlarging the boundaries of the kingdom of their common Lord, they should receive friendly aid from those who were once their greatest adversaries.—*They shall spoil them of the east together.* The people who inhabited the countries situated to the eastward of Canaan are here intended; the Syrians, the Arabians, the Amalekites, and others, who, in times of old, were

* Ezek. xxxvii. 15. *et seq.*

likewise the bitter enemies of Israel. These children of the east, as they are called, should be deprived of the honour and renown which they once possessed, of the vaunted skill and fortitude which they employed against the peculiar people of God.—*They shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab.* Esau, who was also called Edom, was the elder brother of Jacob, and the father of the Edomites, who were almost continually in a state of hostility with the children of Israel. Moab was the name of Lot's eldest daughter's son, and the father of a numerous people, called Moabites, who were often at war with the Israelites. Upon both these people it is here foretold, that Israel and Judah shall lay their hand with such skill and force, and so exert their strength and influence, as to bring them under their subjection.—*And the children of Ammon shall obey them.* This people, who were the posterity of Benammi, the son of Lot's younger daughter, often joined in confederacy with other nations against the inhabitants of Canaan, and proved a very powerful foe, by whom they were from time to time greatly distressed. These Ammonites were to be reduced to a state of subjection to Israel and Judah, whose authority they were to acknowledge, and to whose commands they should yield obedience.—The sentiment contained in the various expressions used in this verse, imports, if I mistake not, that the several nations now mentioned, situated in the vicinity of Judea, should submit to the kingdom of Israel and Judah, when converted to Jesus Christ by the ministry of the gospel; in consequence whereof, the kingdom of Satan, which had been long established among them, should be overturned, and in its room the kingdom of the Son of God should be erected. Accordingly, after the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon, in the times of the Maccabees, the inhabitants of Judea reduced the remains of the nations here specified into their subjection. In their conquests, we behold a lively image of the progress of the kingdom of Jesus Christ,

Christ, of its extension over many peoples and nations, and of the glorious success and complete triumph with which the gospel shall be accompanied, at the happy period in which this prophecy shall receive its full accomplishment. That we may participate in the felicity of the Redeemer's subjects, let us unite our supplications, that he may gird his sword upon his thigh with his glory and his majesty; and in his majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, meekness, and righteousness: and let us cheerfully submit to his divine authority, and gracious administration, whose empire shall yet extend over all the earth.

15 And the LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall finite it in the seven streams, and make *men* go over dry-shod.

In this and the following verse, the abolition of the Egyptian and Assyrian power is foretold, in order to remove every obstruction that might retard the progress of the gospel, and the advancement of the Messiah's kingdom.—By the tongue of the Egyptian sea may be meant, the narrow gulf of the Red sea, which extended in the form of a tongue at the extremity, toward the sea-coast; and might be called the Egyptian sea, as it formed the boundary of Egypt toward the east. This tongue the Lord declares, by our prophet, that he would utterly destroy. The word here used, signifies, to deprive any thing of its former usefulness, so as to render it unfit for the purposes to which it was applied. When, therefore, it is foretold, that the tongue of the Egyptian sea should be utterly destroyed, the expression imports, that it shall cease to be subservient in promoting the designs of the Egyptians, as in times past, and no longer supply them with those conveniencies which it had afforded them. The Almighty, by some remarkable

able interposition of his divine providence, would render this bay of the sea altogether improper for serving the purposes for which it had been employed. Our prophet frequently foretels the great revolutions that God was to accomplish in the state of the world, and the church, in metaphorical language, borrowed from the most extraordinary conceivable changes on things visible; such as the removal of great obstacles, by the levelling of mountains, and the drying up of waters. Viewing the tongue of the Egyptian sea as forming a considerable part of the strength of Egypt, and one of its chief defences, the destruction of its power is intended in this figurative prediction. Though I may not be able exactly to point out the literal fulfilment of this prophecy, commentators being greatly divided in opinion as to this matter, there cannot remain a doubt with Christians, however deficient their information, and various their sentiments, that it hath received its accomplishment. Prior to the collection of Jews and Gentiles into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the Most High, by some remarkable providences, abridged the power of Egypt, altered her boundaries, and diminished her influence, that he might open a way for the ministers of his gospel, and give free course to the word of his grace. In consequence whereof, his people, who were dispersed through that country, abandoning their former idolatry and superstition, subjected themselves to the Messiah's sceptre of righteousness; and every obstacle was removed that might prevent the spread and success of the everlasting gospel in that quarter.

And with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry-shod. The river here intended, seems to be the great river Euphrates, which formed one of the boundaries of the land which the Lord gave for a possession to the posterity of Abraham. In the old Testament, it is sometimes called the River, by way of eminence, though its name is not mention-

ed: 'I will fet (said God to the Israelites) thy bounds
 ' from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philif-
 ' tines, and from the desert unto the river *.' That
 this river is meant by our prophet, is pretty cer-
 tain, from the design that God had in view in shaking
 his hand over it; namely, that there might be a high-
 way for the remnant of his people, which shall be left
 from Assyria. In the expression before us, there seems
 to be an obvious allusion to the wonderful work of
 God, of which you read, Exod. xiv. 21, 22. 'And
 ' Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the
 ' Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east-
 ' wind all that night, and made the sea dry-land, and
 ' the waters were divided. And the children of Israel
 ' went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground;
 ' and the waters were a wall unto them on the right
 ' hand, and on their left.' A similar work was to be
 performed by the Almighty, as the accomplishment of
 this prophecy, that thereby a high-way might be pre-
 pared, such as was anciently made for the Israelites to
 go from Egypt to the land of Canaan, by which the
 remnant of God's people should pass from Assyria in-
 to Judea. For this purpose the Lord declares, that
 he would smite the river in its seven streams. By the
 exertion of his omnipotent arm, by the powerful in-
 fluence of his holy Spirit, which is sometimes repre-
 sented as a mighty wind, he would either dry up, or
 give a different direction to the seven streams, which,
 being united, formed this great river; or, he would
 divide its waters into seven streams or channels; and,
 in one or other of these ways, open an easy passage,
 whereby his dispersed people might return to their
 own land.—This prediction was literally fulfilled,
 when Cyrus, whose right hand God strengthened, by
 forming a large canal, through which the waters of
 the Euphrates were conveyed away from the channel
 of the river, so that people might pass over dry-

* Exod. xxiii. 31. See also Gen. xxxi. 21.

shod. This great work, among others, paved the way for the return of the residue of God's people from Assyria into their own country. It was farther accomplished, by the removal of those impediments which obstructed the spread and success of the gospel, and the gathering into the kingdom of Jesus Christ the remnant of God's people from their wide dispersions.

16 And there shall be an high-way for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

These words plainly express the purpose intended to be accomplished by the predictions contained in the preceding verses, and represent what should be the happy effect of these wonderful interpositions of divine providence.—A way should be opened for the remnant of God's people, of such easy access, so patent, and so much frequented, that it might justly be called a high-way. Every obstacle that prevented their return from Egypt, and Assyria, was to be removed by divine power: mountains should be levelled, valleys filled, and rivers dried up, to afford the people agreeable opportunity of joining themselves to the church of Jesus Christ, and enjoying the inestimable blessings of his kingdom. The deliverance to be wrought for them, should resemble that of Israel in the day he came up out of the land of Egypt. At that memorable period, the Lord their God brought them forth from under the power and oppression of the Egyptians with a strong hand, and a stretched-out arm: he divided before them the waters of the Red sea, and the river Jordan: he led them through the howling wilderness by a way that they knew not: he protected them from the many dangers to which they were exposed: he made ample provision for their support; and conducted them, according

according to his promise, to the enjoyment of a goodly inheritance. In like manner, by the accomplishment of this prophecy, similar glorious displays were to be given of divine power and providence in behalf of his dispersed people. From the various countries wherein they had been scattered, the Almighty would gather them, and conduct them, through every peril and opposition, in the way that leads to the heavenly and better country, where they shall receive the completion of all their just desires, and of all the promises of God.—To conclude, the sum of the prophecy contained in these two last verses seems to be shortly this: The tongue of the Egyptian sea is the kingdom of Egypt; the river Euphrates is the Assyrian empire. By the destruction of the former, and smiting the latter, are intended the remarkable dispensations of providence, whereby these nations, which were always inimical to the people of God, were to be divided and overthrown, to make way for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and the gathering in the outcasts of Israel from the four winds of heaven. The prophecy received its accomplishment, when Augustus Cæsar marched into Egypt, and made it a province of the Roman empire;—and when the Assyrian power was smitten, divided into parts, and made also subject to the Romans; in consequence whereof, a way was opened for extending the Christian church over the whole inhabited world. This great and benevolent design the Governor among the nations is still carrying forward, by means of the various revolutions, and successive changes, which happen in the affairs of this world. To promote this salutary purpose, let us unite our vigorous endeavours with earnest prayers, that the whole earth may be filled with the Redeemer's glory. Amen, and amen.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

IN the foregoing chapter, the prophet had delivered an explicit declaration of the advent of the great Messiah, the excellency and glory of his government, the tranquillity and felicity of his kingdom, and the collection of the Jews from their dispersions, to participate with the Gentiles in the privileges of his church. With these great and pleasing objects fully in his view, he introduces the people of God, united together in one body, celebrating the praises of their great Redeemer in a triumphant song, where, in elevated strains, they extol his glorious grace, and acknowledge his marvellous loving-kindness, manifested in their salvation. In this ode of supreme and singular excellence, variety and beauty are agreeably united; and, being composed in the form of an animated address to God himself, it possesses a fervour and elevation superior to any thing human. The subject is incomparably magnificent, the thoughts are beautifully simple, the style truly sublime, the expression strong, and the figures natural and bold. The sacred writer's obvious design in this effusion of joy and praise, is to warm, transport, and delight the ransomed of the Lord; to inspire them with admiration of their divine Deliverer, and excite them to gratitude to their holy One.

 C H A P. XII.

AND in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.

And

And in that day, &c. The happy period in which the church of God should adopt the words of this song, is affirmed to be that memorable day to which the preceding predictions refer, wherein the great Messiah, the root of Jesse, shall stand for an ensign of the people, to which the Gentiles shall seek;—when the Lord shall set his hand again the second time, to recover the remnant of his people;—when he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.—These remarkable prophecies received a partial accomplishment, when the Jews, after the Babylonish captivity, scattered through many nations, were invited, by the apostles of Jesus Christ, to partake of the spiritual benefits of his kingdom, and the eternal salvation of which he is the Author and Finisher:—when Jews, out of every nation, were called to repentance, and faith in the Son of God; and the gospel was preached with glorious success to every creature under heaven. With pleasure we look forward to their farther completion, in that promised glorious period, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved. This day, then, in which we are assembled to praise the Lord, to call upon his name, and declare his doings among the people, is included in the time to which the prophet refers, as the proper season for singing this divine poem, in grateful acknowledgment of that great salvation, which we ought to contemplate as the wonderful work of Jehovah.

O Lord, I will praise thee. The song begins with thanksgiving and praise, the most comely, pleasant, and joyful exercise of devotion. O Lord, thou eternal, all-sufficient, and glorious Jehovah, art infinitely worthy of praises, and for ever adored by innumerable celestial spirits. *I*, in the singular number, is much more interesting and forcible than *we*, in the plural, would have been. Whilst every thing here is peculiar and personal, the expression seems to intimate,

intimate, the agreeable union of heart and affection with which praise should be offered to God. Every one saved by the Lord, whether Jew or Gentile, reflects with joy on his own personal deliverance, and exults in the glorious liberty into which he is introduced; and, therefore, each for himself, resolves to praise the Lord. I will extol the divine perfections of Jehovah, and magnify those eternal excellencies which I shall never be able sufficiently to celebrate. How consummate that wisdom, which contrived and arranged all the works of the Most High; which devised that astonishing plan, whereby men are raised from the ruins of corruption, sin, and misery, through the intervention of a Mediator, exalted to the highest honours, and invested in the possession of immortal felicity! How infinite that power, which created and preserveth the world; which united the divine and human nature in the person of our Saviour; which was exerted in the miracles that he wrought; which sustained him under the sufferings he endured, rendered him victorious over death, exalted him to the highest glory, and still accompanies the ministry of the gospel! What high praises are for ever due to that tender mercy, which reacheth unto all God's works; which extendeth to the guilty, perishing children of men, forgives all trespasses, admits them into favour, crowns them with loving-kindness, and, by means the most astonishing, confers upon them eternal life! Who can enough extol that greatness, which is unsearchable; that justice, which is inflexible; and the beauties of that holiness, which is for ever adored by innumerable angels, and all the spirits of just men made perfect! Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord! who can shew forth all his praise! Heaven re-ounds with his praises: the earth is full of his glory; and in the congregation of his saints, the high praises of God are in their mouths. Though surrounded with enemies, though encompassed with dangers, perplexed with difficulties, and distressed with spiritual distempers,

distempers, I will bless the Lord, for the salvation of his Son, the gospel of his grace, the promise of his Spirit, the benefits with which he is daily loading me, and the joyful prospects he hath set before me. By this heavenly exercise, I hope my mind shall be diverted from disquieting thoughts, temptations to sin avoided, my heart kept under the influence of divine love, gratitude, and joy, other graces shall be improved, and comfortable evidence enjoyed of my sincerity and integrity. Every day, therefore, will I bless thee, O Lord, and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

Though thou wast angry with me. The righteous Lord is never displeas'd with any creature, except with sinners who have offended him; and, therefore, his anger always supposes, that the person with whom he is displeas'd, hath been a transgressor, and thus expos'd himself to the wrath of the Almighty. What a heart-affecting acknowledgment ought this to be to every man! The Lord was angry with me, for having departed from him, and living a stranger to his love; for having been ungrateful for his mercies, disobedient to his commands, and indifferent to his promises and threatenings. Had it been the anger of man, though the greatest earthly prince, it had been comparatively small. The wrath of a king is much to be dreaded, especially of an absolute monarch, who hath the lives and properties of his subjects at his disposal: 'It is as the roaring of a lion (saith the wise man): 'who so provoketh him to anger, sinneth against his own soul,' Prov. xx. 2. The mightiest potentates on earth, clothed with majesty, and arrayed with terrors, are but feeble worms of the dust, who can do but little, even when most enraged. Before God, they are nothing; yea, less than nothing, and vanity. How dreadful must be the anger of the King of kings, of whose wrath none knoweth the power! How terrible the revelations he hath given of it from heaven, against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men! How awful then beyond description shall it appear, when he will

‘ will come with fire, and with his chariots like a
 ‘ whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his
 ‘ rebukes with flames of fire*.’ Did upright Job
 earnestly request, that God would hide him in the
 grave, and keep him secret until his wrath be past?
 Did Moses require to be hid in the cleft of the rock,
 while the glory of the Lord was revealed? Did they
 whose hearts were tender, tremble at the denuncia-
 tions of this wrath? were their souls filled with
 trouble? did their ears tingle? did their lips quiver,
 and rottenness enter into their bones? for fear of the
 Lord, and the glory of his majesty, did they enter into
 the holes of the rocks, and caves of the earth. How
 dreadful then beyond measure must be the fierceness
 and wrath of almighty God! How shall sinners en-
 dure, when God speaketh to them in wrath, and vex-
 eth them in his hot displeasure. Whose hands can be
 strong, or whose hearts endure, when these awful
 words of God shall be accomplished: ‘ I will tread
 ‘ them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury,
 ‘ and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my gar-
 ‘ ments, and I will stain all my raiment †.’ Were we
 sensible as we ought, that the most high God was
 thus angry with us, with what raptures of gratitude
 and joy would we praise the Lord, and say,

Thine anger is turned away. These words plainly
 intimate, the pleasing consciousness of a happy deliver-
 ance from guilt, and obnoxiousness to punishment,
 with consequent freedom from the terrible effects of
 the divine displeasure. They also import, the desirable
 enjoyment of those satisfying proofs of the favour and
 loving-kindness of the Lord, from whence the mind
 can justly infer the truth contained in this grateful
 acknowledgment; such as the blessedness resulting
 from forgiveness of sins; fear of offending God; in-
 dignation against every species of iniquity; the spirit
 of love, the law of God, and the hope of glory, occu-

* Isaiah lxvi. 15.

† Isaiah lxiii. 3.

pying the heart, and uniformly operating upon the whole temper and conduct. The possession of this inestimable privilege, thus demonstrated, justly affords, in every view, the most ample ground of praise and thanksgiving, which will be expressed by every one participating in this felicity, in such language as the following: Thine anger is turned away; who when thou lookest on the earth, it trembleth; when thou toucheth the hills, they smoke: the effects of thine anger are terrible, destructive, and everlasting. The expressions of thine awful displeasure are now averted, and thou actest toward me in a manner very different from that which I experienced when thou wast angry with me. The tokens of thy wrath, which thou shewedst me in time past, are now happily exchanged for the most agreeable pledges of thy love. Thine anger, compared in thy word to thunder and lightning, from which I had just reason to dread everlasting destruction, burst upon his head whom thou constituted our Mediator, and set forth to be the propitiation for our sins. When thy wrath, like a mighty torrent, rolled toward man with irresistible force, ready to overwhelm him in the boundless abyss of misery and wo, thou, in thy wonderful grace, raised up a mighty One, who kindly interposed in our behalf, turned away thine anger, and caused it to cease. I contemplate him with admiration and gratitude, drinking of the brook in the way, bearing the reproach and rage of men, sustaining the attacks of the powers of darkness, enduring the curse of the law, pouring out his precious blood upon the earth, and laying down his sacred life, to deliver men from the wrath to come.

And thou comfortedst me. What admirable condescension, what unspeakable love, what tender compassion, doth God manifest, in communicating divine consolations into the hearts of his people! Persons may be liberated from slavery, by the arm of power; they may be rescued from oppression, by the exercise
of

of justice; they may be relieved from want, by the hand of bounty: but to pour reviving consolation into the dejected mind, is the kind office of pure affection and pity. God promised of old to his church, by our prophet, 'That as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you: and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem*.' By this beautiful similitude, God is pleased to represent the endearing manner in which he performs the blessed work here thankfully acknowledged. One whom a tender-hearted mother comforteth, is supposed to be in distress and dejection, under which the kind parent is solicitous to administer relief. How manifold the fears, the afflictions, the sorrows, and discouragements, to which the people of God, from various causes, are obnoxious in this present world. Justly may the man of God often say, How weak hath been my faith! how many have been my fears! how powerful my temptations! how strong my corruptions! how innumerable the despondencies wherewith I have been oppressed and disturbed! Amidst all the bitterness and uneasiness to which these things have given rise, thou, Lord, hast restored comforts to me: thou hast revived my enfeebled mind, and conveyed refreshment to my soul, by the sacred influence of thy Spirit, giving me an agreeable sense of thy mercy, the gracious assurance of thy favour, and the precious faith of thy elect, whereby I have joy and peace in believing thy exceeding great and precious promises, which contain the most enriching blessings, to be enjoyed in due season. If the favours that God bestows upon innocent creatures, who never offended him, excite their gratitude and praise, are not our obligations greatly increased? and are not we bound, by many additional ties, to praise the Lord, who extends his consolations to us, who deserved his wrath, and are utterly unworthy of the smallest mercy?

* Isaiah lxvi. 13.

2 Behold, God *is* my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid; for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song, he also is become my salvation.

The prophet, in name of the church, having declared his resolution to praise the Lord, and the grounds on which his determination rested, exults in his intimate relation to God, as a permanent source of confidence, gratitude, and joy.—Man, in his present state, is exposed to innumerable evils, dangers, and miseries, of various kinds. Of all the deliverances he enjoys, God is the Author, who works manifold salvations in all the earth. Creatures may be the instruments of their conveyance; but God is the spring from whence they all proceed. The physician may be the mean of restoring to health; but it is God who performs the cure. The counsellor may give good advice; but it is God who guides by his counsel, and conducts to glory. Soldiers may fight our battles; but it is God who crowns them with victory. Friends may try to assist, relieve, and comfort us; but their success depends entirely upon God. From providences and ordinances we may derive much benefit; but, for this purpose, it is absolutely requisite, that they be accompanied with the divine blessing. In this manner we are taught, that salvation is of the Lord, when his blessing is upon his people; that temporal as well as eternal salvation proceed from the same love, and the same Saviour; and that in the former there is a lively representation of the latter, which seems here chiefly intended.—God is my salvation, saith the redeemed of the Lord: he delivers me from the guilt, the power, and the pollution of sin; from the wrath of God, and everlasting destruction; and confers upon me abundance of grace, everlasting righteousness, and eternal life. He removes every obstacle that lies in the way of salvation: he defeats the hostile attempts of every enemy that would oppose

oppose it: he gives an indefeasible right to its enjoyment; and affords the sure earnest of it, in grace, peace, and consolation, as an infallible assurance of its full enjoyment in due season. Manifold were the benefits, the favours, and deliverances, that God conferred upon the church under the Old Testament: but these were only types of the far more glorious salvation which is in God himself. The Lord Jehovah hath rescued me, with innumerable multitudes, from the most cruel tyranny, and endless perdition, to form my degenerate mind to the noblest sentiments, and most exalted pleasures; to bring me into glorious liberty, and to elevate me to the highest honours and felicity. Though rocks should moulder into dust, though mountains be removed out of their place, though the sun grow dim with age, and all the luminaries of heaven be extinguished, in this will I exult and triumph, God is my salvation.

I will trust, and not be afraid. Trust is that excellent disposition of mind, excited by the Holy Spirit, which consists in the lively exercise of faith and hope, fortifying the soul against all opposition and danger, and producing holy serenity, and undaunted confidence. It arises from just apprehensions of the discoveries which God hath been pleased to afford of himself, and such a firm persuasion of his power and faithfulness as supports the mind, and possesses it of sacred composure, and joy in God. It is not an ill-founded presumption upon the divine goodness, nor a delusive hope of the divine favour and protection: it is not to bless one's self in heart, and to say, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of an evil heart. This is not to trust in the Lord, but in lying vanity. To trust, in the sense here intended, is firmly to rely on the kindness of divine providence, for all necessary provision, protection, and deliverance: it is to place an unshaken dependence upon his faithful promises, for whom it is impossible to lie, that he will accomplish them in due season: it is to repose
ourselves,

ourselves, and all our concerns, on his infinite goodness and love, who will give grace and glory, and every good thing: it is to confide in his omnipotence, whose almighty arm stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth. It is to look to our Maker, and have respect to the Holy One of Israel; to lean upon him as our beloved; to cast our burden upon the Lord, when it is too heavy for us to bear; to stay upon the Lord our God, when unable to sustain the oppressive weight that would crush our spirits; and when we know not where to lay our heads for rest, to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. In one word, to trust, is confidently to rely on Jehovah, for the prevention and removal of every evil, for continuing and bestowing all that is good, so as to have the mind elevated above dismaying fears, perplexing doubts, and embarrassing discouragements.—It is therefore added, *And not be afraid.* No creature, however formidable, no event, however terrifying its appearance, need alarm him that trusteth in the Lord. ‘Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker *?’ Why should you be afraid of the powers of darkness? ‘Though an host should encamp against you, your heart should not fear: though war should rise against you, in this should you be confident. The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid †.’ Why should you be afraid of approaching calamities, like the timorous among the children of men, who are often poor, for fear of poverty; who refuse to part with any thing, lest they should lose all; who are distressed, for fear of distress; and sometimes die, for fear of dying. Blessed is the man whose heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord: he is not afraid of evil

* Isaiah li. 12, 13.

† Psal. xxvii. 1. 3.

tidings, of powerful enemies, of surrounding dangers, of desolating judgments, which are all under the direction and control of that mighty Lord, in whom he hath wisely placed all his confidence.—The sure ground of this trust and confidence is next mentioned:

For the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song, he also is become my salvation. These words composed part of that song of triumph which Moses, and the children of Israel, sung in that magnificent concert which they performed on the sea-shore, in the day that the Lord saved them out of the hands of the Egyptians. They were afterward adopted by the king of Israel into the grateful hymn of praise which he sung with his people, when he offered to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, for a glorious victory he obtained over his enemies. They are here a third time introduced, and engrossed into this sacred ode, in which the church of God celebrates his praises, for a far more glorious salvation than either Israel or David commemorated.—The Lord is my strength, saith every one of God's spiritual Israel, who supports me under the bodily infirmities wherewith I am distressed; who strengthens me with all might in the inner man, and invigorates all the powers of my soul for his service. He is the strength of my understanding, whereby I discern and acknowledge the great mysteries of salvation, and am enabled to perceive the way in which I ought to go. He is the strength of my heart, of which he takes the direction, working in me to will and to do of his good pleasure; giving the willing mind, which makes his work go forward with alacrity and cheerfulness. He is the strength of my affections, which he preserves from becoming languid and feeble, and fixes them upon the proper objects on which they ought to terminate. He is the strength of my graces, who establisheth my faith, enliveneth my love, animateth my hope and patience; who enableth me to resist my spiritual enemies, to vanquish temptations,

temptations, to mortify corruptions, to perform duties, to sustain afflictions, and to surmount all the obstacles that lie in the way to the kingdom of God. Of all my strength, God is the Author; who is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself; and from whom all the power proceeds that is divided among the creatures.—The Lord is also *my song*. His high characters, his divine perfections, his wonderful works, and great salvation, are the chief subjects of which it treats; and Jehovah himself is the great object whose praises I celebrate. No wisdom or power, no love or grace, once worthy to be compared to his. He planned, arranged, and executed every thing worthy of being admired and extolled. No instrument, therefore, shall rival him in my affection, or divide with him the praise in my song.—*He also is become my salvation*. When any object takes full possession of the heart, it views it on every side, and returns to it again and again, never weary of contemplating it with admiring wonder and pleasure.

3 Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

The expressions are evidently figurative, and highly important, meriting our serious attention.—I begin with endeavouring to discover what is meant by the wells of salvation. Jesus Christ, who is the Author and source of salvation, with all the blessings which are continually flowing from his fulness, for the refreshment of needy sinners, may be here intended. From him is derived wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and every thing necessary to gratify the just desires of them that love him. And therefore he saith, ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink *;’ plainly intimating, that he is the fountain which the prophet Zechariah foretold should be open-

* John vii. 37.

ed to the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Though wells are mentioned in the plural, this circumstance does not suggest a sufficient objection against this interpretation; but serves to shew, that the fountain of salvation is to be found in all places, and that grace may be every where derived from its fulness.—By the wells of salvation may be signified, the word of God, comprehending all the inspired books of holy scripture, published for the benefit of the church, by the prophets, the apostles and evangelists, and chiefly by the Son of God himself. This word includes all the prophecies, the promises, and doctrines, respecting that great salvation which God hath prepared for them that love him, comprehending remission of sins through faith in Jesus Christ, sanctification through the Holy Spirit, with eternal glory.—Or, by the wells of salvation may be meant, the teachers and ministers of the gospel, by whom are conveyed, to those who are desirous of participating of divine consolations, the most necessary salutary truths of the gospel, with a plenitude of spiritual blessings, from the fulness of Jesus Christ, to supply all their necessities. The word of God is indeed the principal mean whereby the God of all grace is pleased, through the ministry of his servants, to impart to his people the inestimable benefits of his salvation. Similar metaphorical expressions are used by writers of different nations, and frequently occur even in the scriptures themselves, where teachers are compared to fountains, their doctrine to water, and their scholars to those that drink for refreshment.—Let us approach this pure and open fountain, these wells of grace and salvation, convinced of our need of the inestimable blessings which are there to be obtained, that we may imbibe larger measures of divine consolation, acquire new vigour in the exercise of grace, and get our holy desires fully satisfied.—From these wells,

You shall draw water. The water spoken of, must likewise be understood in a figurative sense, denoting,

as it often does in scripture, the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit * ; such as a clear knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God ; a lively faith in the perfections, providence, and record of the Most High ; supreme love to the Lord our God ; tranquillity of conscience, arising from a comfortable sense of remission of sins, and peace with God ; access with confidence to his throne, the glorious liberty of his children ; joy in the Holy Ghost ; increase of grace, and perseverance in the good ways of the Lord. These valuable blessings are possessed of similar properties with water ; and produce, in the spiritual world, similar effects to those which that precious fluid does in the natural. Water is a necessary element, destitute of which, this earth would soon become a desolate wilderness ; without it, mankind could not possibly subsist. No less necessary are the blessings of the Holy Spirit to the new creation, without which, the man of God could not exist, nor could any of the children of men advance one step in the way of salvation. Water is almost every where enjoyed in abundance, by the poor as well as the rich : creatures of every order commonly have it in plenty, unless when the sins of men provoke the sovereign Ruler of the universe to withhold this inestimable blessing. With equal abundance doth the great Lord of all afford his Spirit to his church, to whom it is conveyed, ‘ as floods ‘ upon the dry ground,’ when sin doth not prevent its liberal communication. Water, as it comes from the fountain, is exceeding fine and transparent, and serves to wash away every kind of stain and pollution. In like manner, the Spirit of God is perfectly holy and pure in himself ; and he it is who cleanses the peculiar people of God from all unrighteousness, and makes them partakers of that holiness which they display with admirable lustre before the world. The salutary influence of water is universal, diffusing itself through every part of nature : it enters into the food

* See John vii. 37, 38, 39.

and sustenance of man, and all the other creatures. The benign operation of the Holy Spirit, with his gifts and graces, is universally experienced in the spiritual world: not a new creature, the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus, who doth not share in their beneficial effects.—There is also a striking resemblance between the purposes to which water is applied, and the effects produced by the Holy Spirit. Water is used to soften hard substances: it mollifies the earth, when rendered impenetrable by frosts, or parched by the drought of summer. The Holy Spirit softens the hard hearts of men, become obdurate and insensible by being withdrawn from the influence of the Sun of righteousness, and the meliorating power of divine grace. Water fructifies the earth; and to it we are indebted for the beauties which adorn the spring, and the rich fruits which are gathered in harvest to cover our tables. The Holy Spirit, by his gifts and graces, adorns the faithful in Christ Jesus with the beauties of holiness, and renders them fruitful in every good work, to the glory and praise of God. Once more: As water quenches the thirst of the weary traveller, and refreshes him when his spirits and strength are exhausted, so the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the fountain of life, gratifies the desires of those who are athirst after spiritual blessings, restores their souls to health and vigour, and disposes them to pursue their journey toward the Zion that is above with increasing alacrity. Other instances of resemblance might be mentioned; but enough hath been said, to shew the import and propriety of the beautiful figure here employed.—It remains to shew what is meant by the words,

With joy shall ye draw water. The drawing spoken of, must likewise be interpreted in a metaphorical sense. Drawing water is an employment which requires strength, labour, and diligence, to which some means or instruments of conveyance are indispensably requisite. From these and other circum-

circumstances attending this operation, we learn the import of the spiritual exercise here intended. The blessings communicated by the Holy Ghost, are obtained by diligent application of the mind to prayer, attentive reading, hearing, and meditation; and by rightly disposing and digesting the subjects read, heard, and contemplated, so as believingly to apply them for the great purposes of spiritual improvement. In this manner the peculiar people of God receive fresh communications of divine grace, spiritual strength, and reviving consolation, from the inexhaustible fulness of Jesus Christ, suited to their various necessities, whereby they are furnished for the performance of duty, supported under the pressure of affliction, and refreshed in their journey toward the heavenly and better country.—This exercise is declared to be accompanied with joy; with the warmest emotions of pleasing affection, exquisite delight, and agreeable satisfaction. The expression seems to allude to the pleasure enjoyed by those travellers who, when scorched with heat, and parched with drought, quench their thirst with the cooling water of some pure fountain. The pleasing sensation felt by such persons, affords a faint representation of the far superior pleasure and joy experienced by the saints, when, refreshed by the water of life, they look forward to the rivers of pleasures which they have in prospect. The blessings which they enjoy, in frequent contemplation, in constant expectation, and daily experience, are exceedingly precious and excellent, procured not with such corruptible things as silver and gold, but by the blood of Christ, whose purchase and gift they are. They are perfectly suited to their circumstances and condition, conveying sight to those who are spiritually blind, strength to the weak, relief to the distressed, happiness to the miserable; and serving to mortify corruptions, to help infirmities, to resist temptations, and disarm death itself. Joy ought always to be proportioned to the intrinsic worth, and extensive utility
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of the benefits received: and, therefore, when the servants of the Lord draw water from the wells of salvation, they rejoice with exceeding great joy, as one that hath obtained a glorious victory, that hath acquired immortal honour, or found great spoil; and that hath the delightful prospect of ceasing from his labours, and entering into peace.—Let us frequently, and particularly this day, have fresh recourse to these wells of salvation, that from thence we may derive living water. For your encouragement, I conclude my remarks on this verse with the very gracious invitation delivered by our prophet, Chap. lv. 1. ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.’

4 And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.

The redeemed from among men, having been represented as forming the noble resolution of praising the Lord, they are here introduced, exciting their brethren to unite with them in this becoming delightful employment.—The kind affection felt for those with whom we are intimately connected ought not to be concealed; nor should the grateful sense entertained of mercies received be confined within the breast of the receiver, but should engage him to invite all with whom he hopes to succeed, to join in celebrating the praises of his generous Benefactor. Sensible of their inability for shewing forth the praises of the Lord their God, and of their need of assistance in this pleasant exercise, those who sing this song of triumph, call upon others to assist them in magnifying the Lord. Solitary devotion, and secret praise, have no doubt their excellencies and advantages; but the voices

voices of multitudes, uniting their hallelujahs, swell the song, until, like the fount of many waters, it becomes grand and awful, while each provokes another to continue with unremitting attention and fervour the celestial employment.—*Praise ye the Lord.* The Hebrew word signifies, acknowledge the Lord: acknowledge the sins you have committed against him, with real penitence, and contrition of heart; acknowledge the glorious excellencies of which he is possessed, with adoration and blessing; acknowledge the benefits you have received from him, with gratitude and thanksgiving. Three words are employed to express this comely exercise; namely, blessing, giving thanks, and praising God. Blessing especially respects the benefits received; thanksgiving, the manner in which gratitude should be manifested; and praise hath a peculiar respect to the divine excellencies of Jehovah, displayed in his works, and the mercies he confers. Such, however, is the connection and resemblance subsisting between these pleasing employments, that when one of them is rightly performed, the others are supposed and included. Praise ye the Lord, with reverence, admiration, and love; magnify his greatness, righteousness, and faithfulness; highly extol him for the mercies and deliverances you receive, and the great salvation that he hath wrought. This is the pleasantest and noblest work in which you can possibly be engaged. The duties of your calling, and diligent attention to business, often require hard labour; and give you to experience the truth of the threatening, ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*.’ The works of righteousness, whereby you give to every one his due, must frequently be performed amid much opposition, and are often accompanied with many discouragements. The works of charity and mercy, whereby you relieve the necessities of the poor and the afflicted, are done at considerable expence, and

* Gen. iii. 19.

sometimes meet with unkind returns. The services of divine worship, in which you approach unto God through a Mediator, remind us of our constant dependence upon Jehovah, of the sin and misery in which we are involved, and our manifold necessities. In prayer, we appear before God as humble supplicants, imploring mercy and forgiveness of sins: in reading and hearing the word of God, we assume the character of scholars, who wish to be instructed, and made wise unto salvation: whereas in praising the Lord, we profess to present before him the best returns we can make for the riches of his goodness and love; we acknowledge the infinite obligations he hath brought us under to his service, to which we ought faithfully to apply ourselves. In this manner we aim to put honour upon God, and to yield him that homage which his glorious attributes, and inestimable benefits, most justly demand.

Call upon his name. The name of the Lord is a Hebraism that frequently occurs in scripture, denoting the Lord himself. In this sense it is used in the following resolution of the royal prophet; ‘I will call upon the name of the Lord*’: and in the words of the apostle Peter, when asserting the efficacy of prayer, rightly performed, for averting every evil, and obtaining every needful blessing; ‘Whosoever (said he) shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved †.’ From these two passages, calling upon God plainly appears to signify, prayer in general, whereby men present their supplications to the Lord, and pour out their hearts before him. Calling upon God more especially consists in that part of prayer properly comprehended under the article of invocation, in which Jehovah is addressed by those names, characters, and perfections, ascribed to him in scripture. Here, however, it may be understood in its most extensive sense, including the whole duty of prayer, consisting of ado-

* Psal. cxvi. 17.

† Acts ii. 21.

ration, confession, supplication, and thanksgiving. Call upon the name of the Lord, who is become your salvation; worship him in the beauties of holiness, who liveth for ever and ever; and adore, with admiration and reverence, his divine excellencies, who is exalted above all blessing and praise. Confess, with true penitence, your trespasses to him, who forgiveth iniquity, transgression, and sin; and, in this manner, give glory to the Lord your God, who waiteth to be gracious, that he may be exalted in shewing mercy. Ask, with humility and faith, all the blessings necessary to your present and eternal felicity, and the welfare of the church of God, from him who can supply all your wants, from his riches in glory, through Christ Jesus, and allows none to seek him in vain. Give thanks unto him who daily loadeth you with his benefits, whose mercies endure for ever, and whose grace faileth never. In all your acts of worship, honour and acknowledge God as the alone Author of your salvation; and uniformly endeavour to testify your gratitude and obedience to him, by living devoted to his service, and depending continually on the care of his providence, and the assistance of his grace.

Declare his doings among the people. The prophet had no doubt chiefly in view, the renowned acts of the Lord, which form the principal subject of this sacred hymn, and are included in that glorious work of divine providence and grace whereby he accomplished the redemption of his people. All the works of God are truly great, and incomparably magnificent: they all unite in accomplishing the purposes of Jehovah, and displaying his glory. This renders them still more illustrious, and worthy to be recorded. Of all the doings of the Lord, the stupendous work whereby he hath accomplished the eternal salvation of his church is the most glorious, and deserving of admiration and praise. Contemplate the primary sources from which it proceeds: the sovereign good pleasure of divine goodness; the great love wherewith
God

God loved the world, even when men were enemies to him in their minds, and by wicked works, and were dead in trespasses and sins. Survey the procuring causes whereby it was obtained, the amazing humiliation, the perfect obedience, the meritorious death, with the subsequent restored life, exaltation, and glory, of the only begotten and well beloved Son of God. Think of the astonishing way by which it is communicated, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; who takes of the things of Christ, and shews them to men; and to whom is ascribed our participation in the inestimable benefits flowing from the love of God, and the mediation of Jesus Christ. Meditate of the blessed means employed for rendering men partakers of this great salvation; the providences, the ordinances, the word, and servants of God, genuine faith, and real repentance, with their various operations and inseparable concomitants, preparing for its complete and everlasting enjoyment. This work, which is in a peculiar manner the doing of the Lord, ought to be marvellous in our eyes, admired in our hearts, published by our tongues, and magnified in our lives, that people of all ranks may become joyful in our God; and all the world may know, love, and obey him, and rejoice in his salvation. In declaring the doings of the Almighty, take heed that you do not confound one thing with another, and that you do not separate what God hath joined together. By the faithful performance of the exercise to which you are here invited, you may hope that glory shall accrue to God in the highest, that the conquests obtained by the great Redeemer shall become better known, that the fruits of holiness and righteousness shall be more abundant, and that the praises ascribed to God and the Lamb shall be multiplied.

Make mention that his name is exalted. The name of God may here denote, the glorious titles, and divine attributes of which he is possessed, that justly
4 X claim

claim the highest honour and esteem from those to whom they are made known. The word rendered *exalt*, signifies to raise to the highest eminence, and so to establish and confirm in that elevated condition, as no power shall be able to molest or depress. The name of God is exalted, when the divine characters and perfections, of which he hath given the most glorious demonstrations, are highly extolled, and celebrated as truly great and honourable. By the salvation of the church, contemplated in its sources, means, and consequences, the illustrious characters, and divine attributes of Jehovah, such as his wisdom, love, power, righteousness, and faithfulness, are displayed with the brightest lustre, and therefore ought to be often mentioned. Make mention, then, that God's name is exalted. This affords an excellent subject of discourse. People often speak at great length of very trifling matters that occur in the common businesses of life, and treat of affairs which it would be more prudent to conceal. Conversation of this sort cannot edify: it cannot make men holier, wiser, or better. Writers frequently relate the counsels and transactions of princes and great men, though foolish, contemptible, and wicked, and the recording of them serves no valuable purpose. Ought not Christians often to mention the wise counsels, and wonderful acts of the Lord, whereby his name is greatly exalted, that they may transmit with honour the memory of his great goodness to latest posterity? To this pleasant and useful employment you are now invited. Engage in it with frequency and alacrity, and you shall certainly find it attended with the most salutary effects to yourselves and others. No topic of conversation so sublime as the name of Jehovah, which is impressed upon all his works, magnified in his word, and exalted to the highest glory and renown, in that great salvation which he hath wrought for his people.

5 Sing unto the LORD ; for he hath done excellent things : this *is* known in all the earth.

To sing unto the Lord, is to celebrate his praises in songs composed of verses, wherein his tremendous majesty is extolled, his mighty acts are recorded, his immense benefits are acknowledged, and his adorable grace is magnified. This delightful exercise, whilst it pleases the ear, assists the memory, warms the affections, and animates devotion. In all the ages of the church, it hath been esteemed an important part of divine worship, in which the people of God have, with united hearts and harmonious voices, proclaimed the praises of his love, righteousness, grace, and faithfulness, manifested in their salvation.—In this blessed work, the scriptures plainly intimate that angels and saints are employed in heaven, where they sing the Song of Moses and the Lamb.—Let it therefore be our solicitous concern, to be prepared for joining these celestial spirits, in celebrating the praises of our God and Saviour. For this noble service, God hath been pleased to furnish us with suitable powers: new matter of praise is continually afforded us, by the bounties of providence: new songs are put into our mouths, by the proper use of which, we may be prepared for receiving new mercies; and at last for joining the church of the first-born that are written in heaven, in those celestial songs which they sing to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. Let us then cheerfully embrace every opportunity of performing this sublime exercise, frequently inculcated in the word of God.—This subject administers just reproof to those who have not a proper sense of the importance and utility of singing unto the Lord; who, without sufficient reason, appear not in the church until this part of divine service be over, and retire from public worship before singing the psalm with which it is concluded. ‘ Who is a
‘ wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst
‘ you?’

‘ you? let him shew out of a good conversation his ‘ works with meekness of wisdom *.’ Forsake not the house of your God; and again, I say, neglect not any proper opportunity of shewing forth the praises of the Lord your God.

For he hath done excellent things. The things here intended, are the works of creation and providence, and especially the great work of redemption. In the things that God hath created, he hath left deep impressions of his divine excellencies, insomuch that though they may not be esteemed excellent on their own account, they should be considered as excellent because he formed them. They justly merit this description, in respect of their various powers and orders, their quantity and quality, their matter and form, their influence and utility. The things that God hath done in the dispensations of his providence are no less excellent. What wonderful order, connection, and design, are conspicuous in the arrangements he hath made! what noble triumphs hath he obtained over his enemies! what equity and truth hath he manifested in all his ways! what awful majesty appears in his judgments! what mercy and goodness in his deliverances! Above all, what excellent things hath been done by the Lord God Almighty, in the redemption of transgressors! So great, so excellent, are the things comprehended in this work, that we have not minds capable of conceiving them, nor words to express them, nor examples to illustrate them. This wonderful work of God, distinguished by its super-eminent excellence, stands arrayed with native incomparable glory. It is of such consummate excellence, and vast magnitude, that it cannot be sufficiently extolled: it hath been highly celebrated through ages that are past, and shall continue to be the subject of everlasting praises. Things are commonly esteemed excellent which are possessed

* James iii. 13.

of every property that can render them valuable and useful, and serve the purposes for which they are intended, especially when they are done in such a manner as excites admiration and delight. The excellency here spoken of, may refer both to the things themselves, and the manner of their execution. The things that God hath done are possessed of every qualification requisite to accomplish the purposes for which they are designed; whilst, at the same time, they are so done as to excite astonishment and pleasure in those who contemplate them. In this view, how eminent, for instance, is the forgiveness of sins, acceptance with God, introduction into glorious liberty, and a right to the high privileges of the sons of God, through the mediation of Jesus Christ; the conversion, renovation, and exaltation, of human nature to eternal life, through the agency of the Holy Spirit!

This is known in all the earth. The fame of the excellent things performed by the Lord, especially of the renowned work of the salvation of the church, is spread abroad through the whole world. They were every where reported in the ministry of the gospel, the sound whereof went throughout all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. What the royal prophet literally affirms concerning the heavens, the apostle Paul allegorically applies to ministers of the gospel, the luminaries of the spiritual world; their ministry extended, as he affirms, to the most distant known regions of the inhabited earth: ‘ Their sound went unto all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world *.’ Thus was the prediction of Jesus Christ in part fulfilled: ‘ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations †.’ In consequence of this prophecy, the joyful tidings of these excellent things that God hath wrought, have reached this highly favoured island which we inhabit. This happy circum-

* Rom. x. 18.

† Matth. xxiv. 14.

stance furnishes us with an agreeable proof of the truth of the assertion contained in the words under consideration. Let us gratefully acknowledge this instance of the divine goodness; and endeavour, with fidelity and diligence, to improve this important advantage.

6 Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

This sacred hymn of thanksgiving and praise, concludes with a warm invitation to the highest expression of exultation and joy.—People often cry out and shout, when greatly elated with the triumphs which they have obtained, and the agreeable prospects that are exhibited to their view. When the ark of the covenant of the Lord was brought into the camp of Israel at Shiloh, we read, that all Israel shouted for joy with a loud shout, so that the earth rang again. When the Pharisees desired our Lord to rebuke the multitude of his disciples, who rejoiced and praised God with a loud voice, for all the mighty works that they had seen, he informed them, That should these hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out, to celebrate his triumphant entry into Jerusalem *. These passages of scripture assist us in understanding the import of the invitation, which is here addressed to every inhabitant of Zion, who is called upon to join in this effusion of triumph, to which the salvation of the Lord affords just occasion. The mount, which was anciently called Zion, is often mentioned in scripture as a figure or type of the church of Jesus Christ; and so by the inhabitant of Zion, is chiefly intended the Israel and children of God, who reside in the church under the New Testament, and participate of the glorious privileges peculiar to this

* Luke xix. 37. *et seq.*

honourable select society. Every individual of this description, is here invited to give the strongest demonstrations of gladness and gratitude of which he is capable, in celebrating the mercies of Jehovah, the victories of the Lamb, and his eternal salvation; who, having overcome, is now conducting them to final conquest, glory, and immortality.—Let every genuine member of the church of Christ immediately comply with the call here given; and express, in the strongest manner, his grateful sense of the greatest of all mercies, the redemption of the world by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.—One substantial reason why we ought thus to shout, is here subjoined:

For great is the holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

God our Saviour is certainly the person here intended by this description, and to him it eminently belongs. He is perfectly holy in his nature, in the works that he hath done, and in the word of his grace his purity shines forth with the brightest lustre. He is the living source of all that holiness of which his people are possessed, the complete pattern which they are called to imitate, and his holiness is the most powerful motive whereby resemblance to him is inculcated. Have recourse then to this holy One, that he may make you partakers of his holiness. Be ye holy (saith he), for I the Lord your God am holy. As the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are seen in the things that are made, so let the other invisible things of God, even his immaculate purity and righteousness, be seen in your temper and conduct. Study, as dear children, to be imitators of God, in his mercy, faithfulness, compassion, and patience.—This holy One is affirmed to be great. ‘Behold, God is great, and we know him not. He is a great God, and a great King above all gods.’ His infinite grandeur and greatness, in majesty and every divine attribute, is often highly celebrated in scripture. He is great in power, both legislative and executive: he commandeth whatsoever he pleaseth, and doth
whatsoever

whatsoever seemeth good in his sight. He is great in goodness and love. How inconceivably great the goodness he hath laid up for them that fear him! How wonderfully great the love wherewith he loved us, when dead in trespasses and sins! How very great are his mercies, which are extended to the most unworthy, and pardon the greatest transgressions! It is unnecessary to enlarge. This holy One declares his greatness, especially in the midst of his people, by the great, unsearchable, and marvellous things, without number, that he hath done for them, and among them. The wonderful works performed by the Lord, in all places, and in all ages, afford the most striking demonstrations of his excellent greatness. But the displays he gives of his grandeur to his people, in the inestimable favours which he confers upon them, the glorious deliverances that he works for them, and the awful judgments which he inflicts upon their enemies, are truly illustrious and magnificent. The holy One of Israel is not only in the midst of his people in general, by his gracious presence, to bless them, and to beautify their assemblies; but he is in the midst of every inhabitant of Zion: he is formed in him the hope of glory, dwelling in him by his word and Spirit, and abiding with him, to sanctify, strengthen, guide, and comfort him.

The greatness of Jehovah demands from you great praises, great services, great love, great fear, great honour, great sacrifices, and great subjection. The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised. Give then, ye kindreds of the people, the glory due unto his name. Take heed that you act up to those principles which you profess to believe and acknowledge. It is an easy matter verbally to confess the greatness of Jehovah, which we are invited to extol; but it is much more difficult to act up to this profession. Having acknowledged that the righteousness of God is very great, beware of arraigning the equity and justice of his dispensations. Having adored him as the only wise
God,

God, be fully satisfied with the conduct and distributions of his providence. Having praised the riches of his mercy and grace, beware of presuming on his mercy to commit sin, and of turning his grace into wantonness. The celebration of the divine greatness is only an unmeaning compliment, if it hath not a happy influence upon practice: it is no more than empty sound, if we act not consistently with our acknowledgments and praises. Our actions are always the best exposition of what we believe and speak.—Remember, Christians, that ye are the temple of the living God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you; that the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. Remember that nothing can be more unseemly than to sing, in a new song, the praises of God with an old heart, or even with a heart not tuned for this celestial employment. If the voice of rejoicing and salvation be heard in the tabernacles of the righteous, how much more ought the voice of thanksgiving and praise to fill the living temples of God! Sing ye praises with understanding: publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of his saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the inhabitants of Zion be joyful in their King, who taketh pleasure in his people, and will beautify the meek with salvation. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah.

Thus, my brethren, through the continued gracious assistance of God, I have finished my Lectures upon the first part of the Prophecies of Isaiah. With what success I leave you to determine. Frequently and seriously recollect what you have heard, and wherein you have profited; and cease not earnestly to implore that the divine blessing may accompany my labours for your benefit. To my exposition of words, add your comment of good works. A living commentary on the Bible is infinitely preferable to the best that ever was written or spoken. I entreat that you will let me

have the pleasure of seeing you diligently carrying on this blessed work. I ask no more, and I can be satisfied with no less than a comfortable answer to this request; which may God dispose you to grant, to his glory, and your own benefit.—I conclude with the words of an eminent writer, which justly deserve your attentive practical regard: “The word of God
 “ was written to give us not merely a speculative ap-
 “ prehension, but an experimental sense and feeling
 “ of holy things, comfortable or terrifying, as our
 “ spiritual state requires. I rejoice at thy word, as
 “ one that findeth great spoil, saith the psalmist. To
 “ this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that
 “ is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at
 “ my word. Too many, alas! have no conception of
 “ this efficacy in scripture; and no wonder, for they
 “ have never seriously endeavoured to have any. But
 “ let them try in earnest, and they will infallibly suc-
 “ ceed, if they use proper means. We read of some,
 “ what will be true of all in the same condition, that
 “ the word did not profit them, not being mixed with
 “ faith. God indeed can operate according to his
 “ own pleasure; but, humanly speaking, persons will
 “ not be influenced by what they disbelieve, or much
 “ by what they believe but faintly. Nay, should they
 “ labour to make the strongest impressions on their
 “ own souls, without applying to him whose gift sav-
 “ ing faith is, their efforts would be vain. But let any
 “ one jointly strive and pray, for a deep conviction
 “ that the Bible is the appointed instrument of his re-
 “ ligious proficiency: then let him read it, not as per-
 “ forming a task he knows not why, from which he
 “ had rather be excused; not to outshine others in
 “ readiness of quotation, or plausibility of interpret-
 “ ing, or oppositions of science, falsely so called; not
 “ to furnish himself with weapons for debate and con-
 “ troversy, much less for uncharitableness and abuse;
 “ but to amend his inward state toward God.—Let
 “ him accordingly stop on fit occasions, and think;

“ What

“ What consolations doth this passage administer to
 “ me? What acknowledgments to heaven doth this
 “ declaration require from me? What fear for my-
 “ self doth this threatening call for? What duty doth
 “ this precept or pattern point out to me? Of what
 “ sin doth it convince me? Against what dangers
 “ doth it warn me? Is my character and behaviour
 “ suitable to this command or exhortation, this de-
 “ scription or good example? Or do I see myself here,
 “ under another name, reprov'd, condemn'd, stig-
 “ matized? Have I acquired that sense of my own
 “ sinfulness and weakness, of God's holiness and
 “ justice, of my need of the merits of Christ and
 “ the grace of the divine Spirit, which the whole
 “ tenour of scripture inculcates? or am I still inclined
 “ to stand or fall by my own righteousness? Faithful
 “ pains taken for some time in such home questions,
 “ without forcing unnatural uses out of any text, but
 “ only dwelling on those that fairly present themselves,
 “ will make us experience a divine virtue in the
 “ sacred writings, piercing first, and healing after-
 “ wards; which, provided we are not satisfied with
 “ being piously moved at the time, and then relapsing
 “ into what we were before, but continue the inquiry
 “ steadily, and carry on every feeling into practice,
 “ will assuredly transform us into what we ought to
 “ be.”——Let us entreat the blessing of God on our
 humble endeavours to understand the scriptures, that
 receiving the seed of the word into good and honest
 hearts, we may bring forth fruit with patience. The
 grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
 and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you
 all. Amen.



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